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Department of Political and Social Sciences

**THE INDIVIDUAL, THE COUPLE AND THE FAMILY:
SOCIAL AND LEGAL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX
PARTNERSHIPS IN EUROPE.**

Frédéric Jörgens

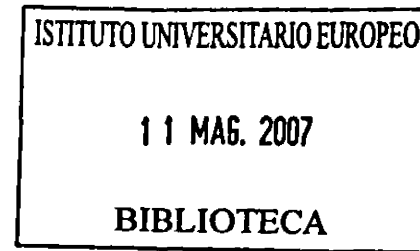
Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of
Doctor of Political and Social Sciences of the European University Institute

Florence, (June, 2007)



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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE
Department of Political and Social Sciences



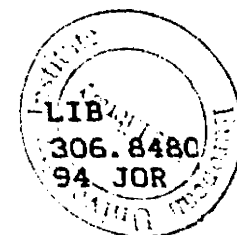
The Individual, the Couple and the Family: Social and Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Partnerships in Europe.

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Introduction

This study analyzes the role of social and legal transformations regarding homosexuality in the construction of gay and lesbian identities. In this respect, the recognition of same-sex couples constitutes a fundamental element of a changing social environment in the contemporary European context and as a phenomenon stands at the centre of the inquiry. The interest in the functions of the law in identity construction explains the topical focus on legal changes. Qualitative research methods are combined with a theoretical inquiry into notions of recognition and identity. Fifty in-depth interviews have been conducted in France, Germany, Italy and the UK. The fieldwork focuses on a metropolitan lesbian and gay bar milieu: respondents were approached in bars and cafés in Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome. This fieldwork and the discourses and narratives that stem from it constitute the main empirical source of the project. The notion of identity management (Goffman), a critical theory approach to recognition (Honneth) and a social theory approach to the individual and social change (Kaufmann) feed into the research project from the outset and are in turn informed by it.

What does it mean for lesbians and gays to experience the current debates on same-sex marriage and partnership laws? How, if at all, do the normative changes in their social environments affect their life plans, the understanding of their own lives, and the expression of homosexuality in public settings? How can the researcher link the very personal level of individual lives to the macro-level of normative change in society at large and in the legal and political realm?

A holistic approach

The field of research itself has been growing at a fast pace in recent years, often focusing on legal studies of legislative advances in a wide range of countries, sociological studies of gay and lesbian everyday life and partnership norms, and philosophical approaches to the question of how the idea of gay marriage is linked to equality, justice and liberty. The rationale underlying the study is defined by a dual extension of the question, first in relation to its theoretical reach, and second concerning its geographical scope. An overall explorative and holistic study has been designed that analyses the topic in a broad social theory perspective as to individuals' identity construction under conditions of social and legal change. The wide scope that is aimed at here, while raising various difficulties for the format of a doctoral

research project, in which the scholar is generally encouraged to narrow his or her focus down to an analytical sub-aspect of the argument, is necessary for the specific problem the research seeks to address.

It is argued that the phenomenon of the changing norms addressing the question of homosexuality necessarily requires the researcher to go beyond the study of either legal frameworks or a quantitative sociological inquiry into the acceptance of homosexuality. At the same time, the sociological use of the notion of homosexuality needs to be defined. A view that would put individuals' experiences into too narrow categories needs to be avoided. Sexual behaviour, social identities and acceptance or stigma in specific social settings need to be viewed as malleable and constituent of one another. The analysis of a changing normative context therefore needs to take lesbian and gay identities as subject to change for the individual who experiences these social changes - as for any social identity. From a more general point of view, researching changing social norms concerning through the thematic field of homosexuality is viewed as particularly interesting because it allows for a promising analysis of how legal and social changes are experienced by the individual, how they are incorporated into the social understanding of his or her identity, and how both are related. Consequentially, this study will analyse the dynamics around the questions of social change, law and norms, identity construction and life plans in an overall holistic, but individual-centred manner.

An empirical milieu study

In doing so, and through the project's fieldwork perspective, a European and metropolitan perspective is taken. Why has fieldwork in four countries been included, and why have capital cities been selected as to the empirical approach? The selection of the cities, and the lesbian and gay milieus within them, is linked to the idea of a clearly situated *milieu study*, as will be developed in the methodological chapter. The European perspective is chosen as a deliberate broadening of the scope of the study, i.e. a scope that transcends the national framework. The recognition of same-sex couples, as it is understood here, is best viewed as a social and legal event that goes beyond specific national political debates. Indeed, the impression has often been produced that the national context, political developments, pressure groups, national debates, governmental changes and the like, were the factors that have determined the progress made in the legal status of homosexuality. In considering events from a wider perspective

however, this impression seems less plausible. It does not appear sufficiently to account for the parallel developments that have occurred with a wave of legal reforms that have swept through Western Europe in the last decade, and with similar social developments in the degree of public acceptance of homosexuality in countries like France, Germany, the UK, Italy and Spain. Abstracting from the national scope and including a range of different social settings from different European countries therefore seemed the most appealing layout for this study. The dual rationale of transcending national contexts on the one hand, and defining an explicitly situated field on the other, has led to the choice of the particular field of lesbian and gay bars in four capital cities. Random selection was adopted to conduct interviews with around fifty women and men. Thus, out of the over 50 persons that were interviewed, 47 women and men were contacted directly in the field, according to stratified random selection criteria.

The study is anchored both in Social Theory and in empirical Sociology, and both inform each other. The question of the individual, the appropriation of norms and the social construction of identity are approached through looking at gay and lesbian discourses on social and legal changes, partnership and life plans and social acceptance. It thereby focuses on the individual within the social and legal settings in which s/he moves. Within such a perspective, the question can only reasonably be addressed through an empirical inquiry that focuses on the perspective of the individual. A research design based on in-depth interviews was therefore chosen. The insights gained through this help to reformulate elements of a more general explanation in Social Theory. At the same time, theoretical approaches are invoked in order better to understand the specific topic that is being observed. As a result, the different role which the law can play in social processes will be explained and the specific consequences of the normative transformations of lesbian and gay identity will be identified.

Social theory: individual, identity, recognition, and social change

The theoretical approach consists of an inquiry into Social Theory and philosophical debates concerning the individual: individual identity, questions of public and private, the role of law in protecting the individual and her well-being, social interdependence, recognition and individuality. Axel Honneth's views on the concept of recognition will be used and partly developed further in the light of the findings. Theories of individuality and identity by social theorists and political philosophers will be used, including Jean-Claude Kaufmann, Erving

Goffman, Nancy Frazer and Joseph Raz. At the same time, recent works on homosexuality, gay and lesbian identities and the recognition of same-sex couples will form the background to the study. Sociological work by Jeffrey Weeks, Marzio Barbagli and Didier Eribon, amongst others, will be referred to, whilst legal studies, in particular by Kees Waldijk, and historical research, particularly by George Chauncey and Florence Tamagne, constitute important background knowledge to the study.

Two approaches remain slightly peripheral to the structure of the inquiry. First, an approach that focuses on the construction of gay and lesbian identity as being inherently linked to the experience of "stigmatisation" or "insults" will be worked with at several stages within the thesis, but will not be taken as the basis for analysis. A key reason for this is the a priori openness to the type of transformations that are being examined. As will be shown towards the end, neither the "insult" as core notion of gay identity nor its disappearance provides a compelling account for the phenomenon under study.

Secondly, a systematic inquiry into gender construction and the impact of gender on homosexual identities has been largely left aside. In particular, the relationship between gender on the one hand, and differences between male and female homosexual identities on the other has remained peripheral to the inquiry. A gender perspective will enter into the analysis at several points within the study, but it shall not be taken to be a determinant factor. This is not to deny its role – indeed both perspectives should be seen as complimentary. As regards the blurring of female and male homosexuality, the choice of the research focus is not based on a view that one can necessarily speak of a fully integrated "gay and lesbian community" in either of these cities: there are important differences. Instead, the choice to base the research on both women and men was a direct consequence of the conceptual question that the recognition of same-sex partnership raises, which by definition concerns both lesbian women and gay men.

The structure of the thesis

In chapter 1, the background to the legal and social changes concerning homosexuality in Europe will be introduced. An initial description of legal and political developments and their connectedness will be provided. This will help to define the precise research question and to clarify the reasoning lying behind the empirical work for the study. The chapter will equally

look at the relevant literature that shapes the outlook of this research, in particular concerning the study of homosexual identities. Some interview extracts from fieldwork will be introduced.

Chapter 2 will define the methodological grounds of the research. Here, various methodological questions concerning the study of sexualities which are of interest beyond the research design for this specific work will be addressed. Also, the question of how to define homosexuality and how to research it appears to be constituent of the entire field of studies across disciplines. The problem of how to define, access and represent women and men concerned by debates on the recognition of same-sex couples is given a particular weight. Subsequently, the choice for the empirical part of the study is laid out, defining the field, sample, form of access and interviews. Some empirical results will be introduced and analytical choices will be discussed through a critical perspective on problems and difficulties that were encountered at the early stages of the interview process. This concerns the question of how to analyse the material, a review of problems of representativeness, the analysis of text, the role of the interviewer and bias.

Chapter 3 provides a first reading of a limited range of interviews in an in-depth biographical perspective. Five broad themes had been specifically addressed: the normative frame (e.g. "What do you think about same-sex marriage?"), social change (e.g. "Is it different today?"), couple life (past and present partnership practice and expectations), projection (e.g. the desire to form a relationship or to marry), and public identity (How or in what social settings are lesbian and gay identities expressed?). The strategy of presenting a limited range of interviews in greater depth is related to a methodological choice in the analysis of the material. Thus, one interview addressing normative positions and social change shall be presented in greater depth. Thereafter, four interviews involving narratives on personal lives, partnership projects, and public identities will be examined. On the methodological level, the chapter will thereby clarify the way in which discourses are read and how, in a second step, typologies are formulated and a comparative perspective between types of discourses is adopted.

Chapter 4 presents the thematic elements of the interviews in a broader perspective. It thus provides the most descriptive chapter that presents a review of the fieldwork material. How are the legal developments and political debates viewed by the respondents? How is the notion of "social change" in relation to social and legal positions to homosexuality and same-sex partnership experienced? Is it felt as a story of progress, a doubtful improvement, or a

continuation of historical ups and down in the liberties of gay and lesbian lives? To what extent is the present development seen as the embracing of the "couple" norm rather than as the recognition of homosexual life plans at large? Do the men and women who are interviewed see marriage or forms of Civil Partnership as options for their own lives? What expectations or wishes do they have concerning partnership and intimacy? Generalizing typologies will be provided in overviews of the entire material regarding the first four themes, and different discursive elements will be exemplified and analysed. Different rationales will be reviewed according to which legal reform recognizing same-sex partnership is seen as "a good thing": a general "progress discourse" will be analysed, and different, sometimes diametrically opposed opinions about projecting oneself into civil partnership or marriage, were it to exist as an option. Finally, the definition of partnership, a crucial underlying feature of the entire project, will be analysed in depth through the respondents' discourses. On this matter, a range of radically different partnership discourses will be identified. Differences between male and female respondents will be looked at in this respect, and the methodological question of researching intimacy and sexuality will be discussed in more depth on the basis of a range of interview extracts.

Subsequently, two more theoretical chapters will address the analysis of the interview material by engaging more closely with Social Theory perspectives concerning identity and recognition.

Chapter 5 proceeds with the thematic analysis from chapter 4 with regard to the remaining theme of "public identity". This interview theme is singled out: It is regarded as most fundamentally related to the research question of how lesbian and gay identities are constructed. Thus, rather than presenting the findings merely through the use of typologies and through a discussion of the relevant narrative elements within the interviews, Social Theory approaches to the study of identity and recognition are gradually afforded a more central position in the analysis: a) through the notion of "identity management", as based on Goffman, and b) through the concept of "recognition" in spheres of love, law and society, as based on Honneth. The different discourses on public identities in the interviews are examined through the examples of the relationship to parents and behaviour in working environments. Here, differences between the cities and between sectors of employment will be discussed. Identity management will be defined. What role does constraint play in specific environments, and how can the individual's ideological choices be accounted for within identity constructions? Such an approach will be distinguished from a "coming out" perspective on gay and lesbian

identity. The analysis will then be linked up with a more abstract discussion of the concepts of identity and recognition. What does recognition mean for the construction of lesbian and gay identities? How should recognition be defined, what does it imply, and how does it function? For this purpose, Honneth's approach to recognition will be restated and critically reviewed as to how it can account for the phenomenon that is being studied here. As will be seen, this chapter thereby provides the basis on which to link both the empirical findings concerning identity on the one hand, and a Social Theory debate on the concept of recognition in defining the impact of the overarching normative transformations that gays and lesbians in European societies are undergoing on the other.

Chapter 6 will substantially integrate the theoretical and empirical parts of the study by providing extensive examples from fieldwork and by cross-referencing to the findings of chapters three to five. Drawing on Kaufmann's sociology of the individual, social change and the process of identity formation in a changing normative environment will be discussed. How is a trend towards recognition and social acceptance experienced by the respondents? Does the experience of recognition directly affect identity construction? What norms does this social change imply? What images are constitutive elements of identity formation? What precise norms does the recognition of same-sex couples imply? Challenges to identity construction occur where transformed norms clash with the individual's choices of identity management: images "bombard" individuals and have a constitutive impact, with however sometimes unpredictable and sometimes ambivalent outcomes. Debates about the "normalisation" of homosexuality will be more extensively engaged with, and contradictory developments with regard to the "trend" towards acceptance will be set out. The different functions which the Law can have in the construction of identity will be examined: in some respects peripheral to individual lives, yet instrumental in others, but in certain cases the legal reference is nevertheless fundamental in conceiving of specific life projects, particularly concerning parenting projects.

The main findings stemming from the combined empirical and theoretical analyses will be summarized in the conclusions: concerning the identification of the normative social transformations, the functions which the Law has for the construction of identity, and the field itself as an object of sociological inquiry.

Research Interest

Finally, it should be noted that the project was formulated against the background of a previous study in Political Philosophy on the Pacte Civil de Solidarité (Pacs).¹ While conducting the research into the Pacs in France, between 1999 and 2001, the topic was hotly debated, and I fervently argued in favour of the Pacs and further reforms through my philosophical argumentation. Positions in favour of the recognition of same-sex couples have since become unspectacular, and a certain saturation of arguments seems to have settled into the debates in liberal philosophy concerning same-sex marriage and related questions. It is at this point that my own research interest was taken to the discourses of lesbians and gays in relation to these changes and debates. The question of how changing recognition and acceptance of homosexual life plans would be appropriated by lesbians and gays from different backgrounds and different ages was one that appeared to me as the logical continuation of the first research project which I undertook.

The fieldwork for this study and the interview material that results from it reflect a multitude of views and positions. As a social science researcher, I have distanced myself from my own positions both in the dialogues themselves and in the immediate analysis.² While an analytical distance can be established, a certain bias in research choices is inevitable. Throughout the chapters, as will become clear, an attempt is made to render choices and possible problems as explicit as possible. An explicit normative element is elaborated when Social Theory conclusions are addressed. Since I myself am rather non-activist concerning lesbian and gay rights, but agree with most lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender claims, I have tried to balance a

¹ Frédéric Jörgens. "Pacs, marriage, and neutrality of the state." (*Modern European Research*, University College London, No 7, 2002: 32-46)

² Taking up an analytical distance of course does not mean not having a socially situated and normative position. On a personal level, my own experience of same-sex partnerships, gay lifestyles and the social acceptance thereof facilitated access to the field and made it easy to relate to the narratives which were the result of the dialogues I would actively engage in. The effort to distance oneself from the field, to which in this case I belonged in the first place, nevertheless leads to several surprises in the discourses that one encounters. It can even put strains on the researcher's own convictions and ideas if the effort to acquire a certain degree of ideological disinterest takes control. Aren't the ways in which my respondents have constructed their lives, their beliefs, their convictions on partnership and other questions, all fascinating and persuasive? I often found myself surprised that most respondents seemed to be firmly convinced that I fully agreed with their own beliefs – whether they defended open or monogamous relationships, spoke in favour of or against adoption by same-sex couples, praised or insulted the "gay scene", complained about conservative gays or blamed lesbian and gay activists, or extravagant or camp men. The stories my participants told me were hugely enriching: mostly compelling, sometimes impressive, sometimes funny, sometimes sad, and all coherent in their own light. At times, I found myself hugely embarrassed at being bluntly inconclusive and unclear when prompted by my respondents, after a long interview in which I had often taken the role of a confidant, to disclose what my own opinions were.

neutral perspective on the discourses I have encountered with a reaffirmation of normative underpinnings in social theory perspectives on the topic.

Chapter I

Background

The interviews conducted for this study are set against a political and social climate that has seen debates over and changes to the status of same-sex couples, marriage, and homosexuality more generally. The following extracts reflect this:

Harriet, London, December 2004

It's probably long overdue for this sort of stuff to change. I'm not too knowledgeable about the exact legislation that's going through for the civil [partnership] recognition for couples. But it's got to be better than it is now.

Jérémy, Paris, February 2004

I am not totally in favour of reproducing the heterosexual norm, that's for sure. But then, I find it normal that there should be recognition of the gay couple, at least [for] those who feel the need to sign a *Pacs* for example. I can fully understand that symbolically it's important. But that's [all] there is to it.¹

Hans, Berlin, August 2003

Well and good, and sad that we had to wait for a new millennium to get that. But I think there are France, Spain and Norway [...] I don't quite know, I think about six or seven European countries did that before Germany did it.²

Gabriella, Roma, May 2004

So I don't see why, if one gets married, straight people get married, they get benefits, but a couple that stays together for many years can't. We are behind in Italy compared to the other European countries.³

Léa, Paris, December 2003

I think that people pretend to have a certain tolerance, concerning marriage and all of that. In fact, it's as if you threw crumbs to a dog, you know. Ok, we'll give them that and they will be happy. And then we won't hear anyone talk about them anymore. And I think it's more about the fact that they [French policy-makers] are behind as compared with other countries and feel the need to catch up. So I think they gave us the *Pacs* to say, well actually, we too have made a little effort in that direction.⁴

¹ Original: "Je ne suis pas absolument pour reproduire la norme hétérosexuelle, ça c'est clair. Mais après, je trouve ça normal qu'il y ait une reconnaissance du couple gay, en tout cas ceux qui éprouvent le besoin de se passer par exemple. Je peux tout à fait le comprendre; symboliquement c'est important. Mais voilà quoi."

² Original: "Gut und schön, und traurig, dass man erst 'ne Jahrtausendwende dazu abwarten muss. Aber ich glaube da sind Frankreich, Spanien, Norwegen, [...] ich weiß es gar nicht, aber sechs oder sieben europäische Staaten, die vor Deutschland das gemacht haben, ne."

³ Original: "Quindi non vedo perché se uno si sposa, gli eterosessuali si sposano, allora la moglie debba usufruire, invece se una coppia rimane per tanti anni insieme, non possa farlo. Cioè noi siamo indietro in Italia rispetto agli altri paesi europei."

⁴ Original: "Je pense que les gens font semblant d'avoir une certaine tolérance, vis-à-vis du mariage et tout ça. En fait c'est comme si tu jetais des miettes à un chien : Bon, on va leur donner ça, comme ça ils seront contents. Et puis on n'entendra plus parler d'eux. Je pense que c'est plus le fait qu'ils se mettent à jour par rapport aux autres pays, puisque on a un retard certain. Donc je pense qu'ils nous ont donné le *Pacs* notamment pour dire : ben nous aussi on fait un petit effort de ce côté-là."

The recognition of same-sex partnerships can be regarded as one of the most fundamental social changes in Europe⁵ during the last ten or fifteen years. Its importance, as has been claimed, goes beyond the consequence it has on those homosexual couples that have signed civil partnerships, Pacs, or have married. Its societal impact, which explains the heated debates that have accompanied it, is closely linked to the definition of the family, the conception of gender roles, the conflict between secularism and religious morality, and the link between sexuality and the private sphere. In turn, the vast societal interest for this matter has increased the attention that lesbians and gays themselves have given to legal partnership options.

For many gays and lesbians in various European countries, the debates and the legal changes and reforms that have occurred in their own or in neighbouring countries have become an important topic that they have followed in the media, the gay and lesbian press, and discussed with friends. The fieldwork conducted for this study confirms, on the one hand, the relevance of the changes and debates to the lesbians and gays⁶ who were interviewed irrespective of their partnership status, and, on the other hand, a large diversity of ideas about the couple, marriage and the family. In the following, the factual changes in European countries will be looked at.

Gay and lesbian marriage has become a reality in three EU countries, the Netherlands (2001), Belgium (2003) and Spain (2005).⁷ Many other EU countries recognise same-sex couples through some other form of partnership institution, including France (1999), Germany (2001) and the UK (2005), along with all Scandinavian countries and various smaller European countries (see map). Overall, the recognition of same-sex couples has become a mainstream fact within the EU. It is this development that forms the starting point of the research project presented here.

⁵ Europe, European Union and Western Europe are clearly three different social and geographical units. The different notions are used throughout the introduction. The trend is seen as a European one – while the focus of the fieldwork is a specific Western European metropolitan lesbian and gay lifestyle. As will become clear throughout the work, there is a tension as to whether one could speak of a Western trend, in more general terms. Alternatively, it could be said that the selected European context provides for a good reading of a particular articulation of a broader Western trend.

⁶ As will be discussed at a later stage, differences of self-identification, especially but not only concerning bisexuality, are bracketed in the terminology – unless the topic is specifically addressed. "Lesbian" and "gay" will refer to "non-heterosexuals" for matters of stylistic simplification. On this latter term compare: Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan. *Same Sex Intimacies. Families of choice and other life experiments*. (London: Routledge, 2001)

⁷ In Spain, parliament voted on opening marriage to same-sex couples in April 2005; in Sweden, marriage is also planned to be opened to same-sex couples in addition to the existing registered partnership model.

Map 1: Legal Recognition of same-sex partnership in European countries⁸



This contemporary trend has taken root within the last three decades, but it is, in particular, during the 1990s that we can speak of a firm social trend in what we could call the heart of the European Union and the majority of European countries. Whereas the legal recognition that creates rights for same-sex couples through various forms of partnership registration provides the objectifiable evidence of such a trend, social norms, public opinion and greater visibility also show the same trend towards a greater acceptance of same-sex partnerships and homosexuality.

As the following table shows, the increase in favourable opinion concerning the question as to whether same-sex couples should be allowed to marry is a trend that applies to all countries that are taken into account in the available data set (the 12 countries that were EC members in 1993 and for which reliable comparative data was available), with differences in scale and with the exception of Greece.

⁸ Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Samesex_Map_Europe.png (February 2007)

Table 1: Favourable opinion of same-sex marriage in Europe⁹

	2006 Eurobarometer 66	Change since 1993 Eurobarometer 39	Compare 2004 Gallup Europe
The Netherlands	82%	+20%	80%
Denmark	69%	+10%	82%
Belgium	62%	+20%	67%
Luxemburg	58%	+25%	71%
Spain	56%	+15%	68%
Germany	52%	+25%	65%
France	48%	+20%	58%
United Kingdom	46%	+15%	47%
Ireland	41%	+20%	46%
Italy	31%	+5%	47%
Portugal	29%	+10%	43%
Greece	15%	+0%	11%
Poland	17%	-	10%
EU 25	44%	-	53%
Turkey	-	-	16%

The numbers in table 1 thus show a general trend, and in particular a large increase of support for same-sex marriage where legal recognition has already been granted (e.g. Germany +25%, France +20%), a fact that will be discussed below. Italy instead stands out in two respects: not only is the increase of support very limited according to the Eurobarometer survey, but also the surveys from the two institutes differ widely for this country. The two observations may be seen as compensating for one another, if the Eurobarometer 2006 number is regarded as too low (compared to Gallup), but the lower increase can also be interpreted as being linked to the fact that no legal recognition has been introduced which could have triggered an increase in acceptance of such a legal fact. We will return to this question below. Poland and Turkey (where comparable data was available) are added in this list as the countries of either EU or EU candidate countries with the largest populations, and as an illustration of a situation in contrast with the Western European countries.

These two elements thus constitute the basis for what can be called a recognition trend. In the following, the legal reforms will be considered in some more depth before the links between the legal reforms and societal acceptance will be examined.

⁹ Sources: Eurobarometer 66 (2006), Eurobarometer 39 (1993), and Gallup Europe (2004). In the Eurobarometer survey, the numbers represent those who "agree" to the following statement: "Homosexual marriages should be allowed throughout Europe." In the Gallup survey, the question asked was: "Do you agree with the authorization

1.1. European countries and legal reforms and social change

From a legal perspective, we can speak of a wide-reaching inclusion of same-sex couples in the definitions of partnership legislation in Europe. This inclusion is not universal. Major EU countries such as Italy¹⁰ and Poland, and various other EU countries - Greece, the Baltic countries, Slovakia, Cyprus, Malta, Romania and Bulgaria - do not recognise same-sex couples, and the same is true for all East and South-East European non-EU countries with the exception of Croatia. Furthermore, the recognition is seldom on an equal footing to that of couples of the opposite sex. This is only the case in the Netherlands, Spain and Belgium and for near to all practical purposes also in Sweden and the UK, while the laws in France and Germany are judged by most lesbian and gay activists to be insufficient. Nonetheless, a fundamental shift has occurred in the principle itself and the issue has consistently been placed on the agenda throughout Europe.

Worldwide, the Netherlands was the first country to recognize the legal status of cohabiting same-sex partners in 1979.¹¹ Since then, a large number of European countries has implemented reforms in this area. In 1989, Denmark introduced a specific form of registration for same-sex partnerships.¹² The other Scandinavian countries, Norway in 1993, Sweden in 1994, and Iceland in 1996 followed with similar partnership registration models.¹³ During the 1990s, the question of the recognition of lesbian and gay couples entered the political debates in most EU and other European countries. In the four years between 1997 and 2001, the number of European countries with legislation that recognises same-sex couples rose from 7 to 19.¹⁴ This number has since risen to 22. Often, albeit not always, the tendency to reform depended on the political majorities in a country: leftwing governments tended to push for or

of homosexual marriages throughout Europe?" Absolutely agree or rather agree are added here. For the comparative numbers, figures are rounded to 5-10 intervals.

¹⁰ Parliamentary debate on civil unions ("diritti dei conviventi: DICO") in 2007, see *La Repubblica* 31/1/2007. Newspaper sources will only be listed in the bibliography where personalised articles such as editorials, rather than news reports, are concerned.

¹¹ This date marks an initial amendment that includes same-sex couples in legislation on cohabiting but not registered couples, *Staatsblad* 1979, nr. 330, "Duurzame gemeenschappelijke huishouding". Registered partnership was introduced in the Netherlands in 1997, *Staatsblad* 1997, nr. 324, "Geregistreerd partnerschap". For details on references and the legal changes in this section, see e.g. Robert Wintemut and Mads Andenaes. *Legal Recognition of Same-sex Partnerships. A study of National, European and International Law*. (Oxford: Hart, 2001); also ILGA Europe: www.ilga.org/Information/Legal_survey or www.lamdbalegal.org

¹² Lov om registreret partnerskab, 7 June 1989, nr. 372.

¹³ Norway and Iceland are non-EU countries; and while Iceland is a Scandinavian country is not necessarily European. These distinctions are however peripheral for the point that is being made in describing the trend of the developments. Norway: 'Lov om registreret partnerskab', 30 April 1993, nr. 40; Sweden: 'Lag om registrerat partnerskap', 23 June 1994, SFS 1994:1117; Iceland: 'Lög um stadfesta samvist', 12 June 1996.

introduce recognition of some sort. This has been the case in France, Germany, the UK and Spain. The left-right divide seemed less of an influence in the Scandinavian countries, Belgium and the Netherlands.

In France, after a fierce political confrontation on the reform and an extremely lengthy parliamentary debate, the 'Pacte civil de solidarité' (*Pacs*) was adopted in 1999 as a form of partnership registration that is also open to same-sex couples.¹⁵ In Germany, with the 'Eingetragene Lebensgemeinschaft', a limited form of same-sex marriage was created in 2000.¹⁶ It provides a relatively small number of material benefits to the registering couple, while allowing for the same rights to residency and citizenship as for married couples.¹⁷ The Netherlands allowed marriage between two persons of the same sex in 2001 and has thereby eliminated all legal distinctions between heterosexual and homosexual couples.¹⁸ The option of registered partnership, open to both same-sex and opposite-sex couples, remains an alternative. Belgium followed suit in 2003, including the right to adoption since 2005-2006.¹⁹

Following the election of a new PSOE-led (left-wing) government in 2004, Spain implemented same-sex marriage and adoption rights in 2005.²⁰ This development, coming after several regions including Catalonia and the Basque Country had already implemented some form of partnership recognition, was observed with surprise by many who had long

¹⁴ *Ilgas Europe newsletter*, vol. 1, issue 3, November 2001, p. 5. Numbers vary according to whether 'weak' forms of recognition such as e.g. in Portugal, Austria or Hungary, are included. 19 is based on an inclusive count.

¹⁵ Loi 99/944 du 15 novembre 1999 relative au Pacte civil de solidarité, *Journal Officiel*, 16/11/1999. On the debate, see e.g. Daniel Borrillo and Pierre Lascombes. *Amours égales ? Le Pacs, les homosexuels et la gauche*. (Paris: Découverte, 2002), pp. 77-91.

¹⁶ Implemented in 2001: 'Lebenspartnerschaftsgesetz', *Bundesgesetzblatt*, Teil 1, 2001, p. 266. For a legal analysis see e.g. Manfred Bruns und Rainer Kemper. *Lebenspartnerschaftsrecht*. (2nd edition. Nomos: Baden-Baden, 2006)

¹⁷ The fact that the Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft implies much fewer rights than the Civil Partnership probably explains the diverging numbers of partnerships signed: In Germany, between August 2001 and December 2004, about 12,500 partnerships were signed (out of which approximately two thirds are male couples - only incomplete yet significant data was available, see: LSVD 30/9/2005. For Berlin, the precise number until the end of 2004 was 1,836 couples: 1385 male, 451 female.) The number was judged to be higher than expected. In contrast, in the UK, 15,672 Civil Partnerships were formed in only less than one year, between December 2005 and September 2006. Just over 60% were male, and about one 1 out of 4 was formed in London. (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1685>) In France, by contrast, as the third country of the field in this study where the option to register exists, the figures include both heterosexual and homosexual couples: 204,000 between November 1999 and December 2005 - the proportion of same-sex couples is not known. See *Infostat Justice* 89, "Le pacte civil de solidarité: progression spectaculaire en 2005." (No. 89, June 2006)

¹⁸ 'Act of Opening Marriage', voted on 21 December 2000, *Staatsblad* 2001, nr. 9.

¹⁹ In the Belgian case, adoption however remains excluded for same-sex couples. For a detailed analysis of the Belgian debate see: David Paternotte. "Beyond the laws: right to marry, citizenship and inclusion models in Belgium." Anne Weyembergh and Sinziana Carstocea (eds.). *The gays' and lesbians' rights in an enlarged European Union*. (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2006: 127-143)

described Spain as the archetype of a deeply Catholic society. On the one hand, opinion polls and developments in civil society and post-Franco national culture had already shown a broader acceptance of homosexuality than in other South European countries.²¹ On the other hand, the Catholic Church launched a large campaign in Spain opposing the reform, including the call for civil disobedience in 2005.²² This event as a whole, with the simultaneous appointment of Joseph Ratzinger as the new Pope, who had been a highly conservative advocate of traditional Catholic views of the family within the Catholic church, raises the question to what extent the debate has been re-opened as a whole and whether a new debate which puts into question the idea of a trend towards greater acceptance is in progress. However, it can be argued in the same vein that the course of the debate in Spain parallels that in France and Germany, or the United Kingdom: In these three countries, a radicalisation of anti-reformist positions was followed by an overall acceptance at least at the political level, of the newly established status quo.

In the UK, debates have been similar in that there was significant conflict over the question of homosexuality. However, the focus of the contentious debates was a different one: political opposition concerned not so much the question of the couple as the lowering of the age of consent and the withdrawal of the so-called "section 28" that forbid the mentioning of homosexuality at school. Somehow strangely, if compared to the Continental debates, it was adoption rights that were first opened to same-sex couples in 2002, and in overall unanimity. One argument why this was the case as compared to France or Germany can be found in the numbers of parentless children being higher in the UK, and the possibility of increasing the number of possible adoptive parents was welcomed on a pragmatic basis.²³ In 2004, the government introduced, the Civil Partnership Bill, which took effect in December 2005.²⁴ Unlike in France and Germany, the UK model includes nearly all the same rights and benefits

²⁰ For an anthropological perspective on the Spanish case, see José Ignacio Pichardo Galán's analysis, e.g. José Ignacio Pichardo Galán. "Antropología y matrimonio homosexual." (*Revista Iberoamericana de Antropología*, No. 35, March-April 2004)

²¹ E.g. Eurobarometre 39, 1993: Over 40% of the population was found to be favourable to same-sex marriage, thus making Spain as the third most favourable EC-12 country after Denmark and the Netherlands (n.b. Sweden was not yet included as the Eurobarometre was before it joined the EC).

²² See e.g. interview with Cardinale Trijillo, *Corriere della Sera*, 22/4/2005.

²³ See e.g. Steve Doughty. "Rise in adopted children living with gay couples." *Daily Mail*, 19/1/2007: "One in every 20 children adopted from care goes to live with a gay couple [...]. Tony Blair [...] was championing adoption reform as an "eye-catching initiative". [...] [It is] Mr Blair's attempt to make adoption easier and find permanent new parents for the 60,000-plus children stuck in the care system [...]. Under Labour, social workers have been pressing for more gay adoption."

²⁴ See e.g. C. Dyer. "New legal rights for gay couples." *The Guardian*, 7/12/02. Or: BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/2549437.stm.

accorded to married couples; it thereby establishes a situation close to parity.²⁵ It is noteworthy that in the UK, the establishment of Civil Partnership was hardly accompanied by any debate and the vote in Westminster was not even reported in most of the main national newspapers on the day the Bill passed. This lack of interest in the reform paralleled the consensus between the three major political parties, including large parts of the Conservative party where more progressive MPs such as Alan Duncan had taken the lead on the issue and whose MPs had a split vote on the civil partnership bill.²⁶

In some other European countries, same-sex couples have been given a very limited set of rights to the same extent as cohabiting unmarried couples; this is the case in Hungary, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Austria. In Portugal, cohabiting same-sex couples have been granted rights as de facto civil unions since 2001, and the opening of marriage to same-sex couples is being debated within the Socialist party, in power since 2005.²⁷

However, throughout Europe, it would be difficult to overlook contradictory developments which point both to a full acceptance of same-sex lifestyles and public gay and lesbian identities on the one hand, but to growing concerns over tolerance and the protection of minorities in certain countries, and particularly in Poland, on the other.²⁸ Poland, on the political level, has seen a consolidated rise of right-wing populism with strong links to both right-wing extremism and traditional Catholicism, ranging from anti-abortion to anti-Semitic and homophobic positions. The formation of a populist right wing government has stoked fears over a political backing to organised attacks and homophobic procedures, including police procedures.²⁹ Opinion polls indicate a similar negative trend over the question of

²⁵ "Over the course of the debate of the Civil Partnership Bill, a scheme which had been designed to give many of the advantages to lesbian [women] and gay men developed into one in which *every* right and responsibility arising from marriage, in the power of the state, was made available to civil partners, with the exception of a church ceremony. The title would be different." Mark Harper, Martin Downs, Katherine Landells and Gerald Wilson. *Civil Partnership. The New Law* (Bristol: Family Law, Jordan Publishing, 2005), p. 4 (my emphasis). In the UK, Anglican (Church of England) wedding ceremonies are covered by the law and form the only explicit legal exception.

On the basis that Civil Partnerships did not grant full equality on the symbolic level, two women who had legally married brought an action before the High Court. The court held that due to the rights which they could obtain through a Civil Partnership and which were equivalent to marriage, and indeed more extensive than those of Canadian marriage law, the denial of same-sex marriage was not a discriminatory policy. See: Wilkinson v Kitzinger & Ors [2006] EWHC 2022 (Fam) (31 July 2006).

URL: <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Fam/2006/2022.html>

²⁶ See e.g. Ben Townley. "Tories split over Civil Partnerships." *Gay.com*, 22/3/2004, uk.gay.com/headlines/5999

²⁷ See e.g. Ilga Europe www.ilga-europe.org/europe/issues/marriage_and_partnership/same_sex_marriage_and_partnership_country_by_country

²⁸ And, in a broader European context equally particularly in Russia.

²⁹ See e.g. Maxim Leo. "Die Versteckten." *Berliner Zeitung* 19/11/2005.

homosexuality on the societal level.³⁰ This points to a stark contradiction between the Polish developments and the view of social progress and the opening of social norms to include homosexual lifestyle that have been associated with the developments in Western Europe over the last decades.

How can we account for the developments in Poland? They are not an entirely isolated phenomenon. Developments in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Turkey are contradictory.³¹ The situation for lesbians and gays in former Soviet Union, and in Russia in particular, seem to link up to the Polish case.³² Two interpretations are possible. A view of geographic differentiation would consider the former Eastern European countries, but also Turkey, as standing before a watershed – either melting into the Western European social and political traditions, including pluralist democracy, minority rights, free press, or going their own way in redefining their political unity in autocratic terms, putting majority rule, national unity or religious dogmatism ahead of liberal rights. While the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia appear to fall under the first category, Russia, Poland and possibly Turkey could be placed in the second.³³ We should then consider, concerning the question of the acceptance of homosexuality, but possibly also in other respects, that a European social space has moved towards a greater acceptance of public homosexuality, including state recognition of partnership, but that this social space is restricted to Western and some of Central Europe, placing other countries at its fringes, such as Poland, but also possibly some parts of Southern Italy, Greece, and, in certain respects, Ireland.

A second view would be one of contradictory developments and unstable consensus. Particular social groups in all countries are virulently hostile to public homosexuality, including the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, Muslim traditionalists, some other religious groups, and right-wing extremists. All countries in Europe have been exposed to the topic of homosexuality and its legal status and social acceptance. The battles on the topic have been played out differently and with different results. Hostility varies from a temporarily silenced

³⁰ See e.g. Pew Global Attitudes Project (2003), p. 114f.

³¹ On the case of Romania liberalization of laws concerning homosexuality see Sinziana Carstocea's analysis of internal and external (EU) factors Sinziana Carstocea. "Between acceptance and rejection. Decriminalising homosexuality in Romania." Weyembergh and Carstocea, eds. (2006). *Gays' and lesbians' rights*: 207-222.

³² Pew Global Attitudes Project (2003): "Opinion in Europe is split between West and East. Majorities in every Western European nation surveyed say homosexuality should be accepted by society, while most Russians, Poles and Ukrainians disagree. Americans are divided." Quote from news release 06/03/2003: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=185>. On Russia see e.g. Jackson, Patrick. "Gay pride challenges Moscow." *BBC News* 17/2/2006, <https://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/europe/4714818.stm>

minority (e.g. Germany or UK), a virulent minority (Spain), a moderate majority (e.g. Ireland), to a virulent majority (Poland). One of the interpretations of course does not exclude the other.

The important question for this study is how these contradictions should be accounted for in the analysis of what is described as a European phenomenon or European trend. Certainly one should not consider this as a linear trend as would be suggested by the numbers of countries having some legal recognition of same-sex couples: here, the figures have indeed kept on progressing. However, accounting for contradictions does not necessarily undermine the phenomenon as a whole. In fact, its European character seems quite plausible on many accounts. It has been standard in many national studies to take account of regional differences.³⁴ In a similar way, cultural differences can be distinguished within a study that takes a European perspective on the phenomenon, and account for certain contradictions within the European social space under consideration.

Two other main questions emerge regarding the significance and the validity of the observed 'European trend':

- 1) Is it specifically European, or rather generally Western?
- 2) Has the legal trend any significance on its own or is it not rather the consequence of changing social norms?

Combining these two questions, the European trend towards legal recognition can be reinterpreted as symptomatic of a Western liberalisation of social norms regarding homosexual lifestyles.³⁵

³³ The question remains open what role EU membership (in the case of Poland) or EU entry negotiations (e.g. for Turkey) can play in changing this trend.

³⁴ See e.g. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2000), *Same-sex intimacies*, or Marzio Barbagli and Asher Colombo. *Omosessuali moderni*. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001)

³⁵ One should not forget the ambiguity of such a trend concerning homosexuality if the trend is one-dimensionally viewed as a Western moral advance. It is worth recalling that it was European colonisation combined with Christianisation that effectively outlawed various forms of homosexuality in their colonies in various cultural contexts around the world. (see e.g. Rhoda. E. Howard-Hassmann. "Conflicts between Liberal and Illiberal Belief systems." (*Human Rights Quarterly* 23.1, 2001), pp. 82ff. This historical dimension will however not be treated within this research – the ambiguity arising from it will however be mentioned in chapter 6.)

1.1.1. A European trend as opposed to what?

While European countries form the bulk of those countries in which forms of same-sex partnership recognition have been introduced, one can also look at important developments in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.³⁶ European countries have often been given as a paradigm for these current developments.³⁷ The case of the US should be pointed out for the importance of discussions in civil society and the academic field. The debate here has been fostered by state courts, notably first in Hawaii, which judged the exclusion of same-sex couples to be unconstitutional on the individual state level.³⁸ However, the American political response to the legal argument was an overwhelming refusal by both the federal government and other state authorities to open up marriage to same-sex couples, be it through similar judgements in other states or on the basis of the obligation to recognise marriages from other states. As a result, the Defence of Marriage Act exempts states from the obligation to recognise other state legislation on this specific issue, and governors and voters of 36 states have passed legislation that explicitly redefines marriage so as to exclude same-sex couples. Massachusetts has been the only State to introduce same-sex marriage, and here as well, the first impetus came from the courts.³⁹ Seven additional US states with different same-sex civil partnership laws remain exceptions to the rule, and have seldom come from the state legislatures.⁴⁰

³⁶ E. J. Graff. "The Trend Toward Same-Sex Marriages." (*Radcliffe Quarterly*, Winter 1998) [E.J. is her full name signature in all publications] In Australia, this concerns immigration policies for foreign partners, in the US and Canada, partnership rights have been introduced on state/province levels, notably in Vermont and Hawaii in the US and Québec, Nova Scotia and Manitoba, see: Department of Justice Canada, 'Marriage and Legal Recognition of Same-sex Unions', Discussion paper, November 2002, <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/dept/pub/mar/3.html>. One can also point to Cambodia (see e.g. "Cambodian king backs gay marriage", *BBC News*, online version, 20/2/2004 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3505915.stm>), although developments here have so far remained inconclusive.

³⁷ Department of Justice Canada. "Marriage and Legal Recognition of Same-sex Unions" (Discussion paper, November 2002) <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/dept/pub/mar/3.html>

³⁸ Eric Fassin. "Homosexualité et mariage aux États-Unis: histoire d'une polémique." (*Actes de recherche en sciences sociales*, December 1998, No 125 "Homosexualités": 63-73) See p. 64f. The article analyses the US developments in contrast to the French case.

³⁹ See e.g. <http://www.marriagewatch.org>, 36 states in April 2003. For various points on the US and EU I am indebted to Nelius Carey, see Nelius Carey. *Opening up marriage to same-sex couples: why separate but equal is intrinsically disordered*. EUI PhD thesis, 2004, <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/4589>

⁴⁰ The argument that US developments are based on "activist judges" has been heavily politicised by President Bush: "These amendments and laws [defining marriage as a union of a man and a woman] express a broad consensus in our country for protecting the institution of marriage. The people have spoken. Unfortunately, this consensus is being undermined by activist judges and local officials who have struck down state laws protecting marriage and made an aggressive attempt to redefine marriage." George Bush. White House Press Release 5/6/2006. See: www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/06/20060605-2.html.

In contrast to this, one should point to the EU institutions, where the European Parliament has continuously supported non-discrimination policies, including renewed explicit recommendations to recognize same-sex partnerships in 1994, 2000 and 2003.⁴¹ One should also note the role of the European Commission in accession negotiations with the current wave of EU enlargement concerning non-discrimination⁴² following the explicit reference to sexual orientation in combating discrimination in the Treaty of Amsterdam⁴³. Also, from the jurisprudence perspective, in contrast to the US, European national courts and the European Court of Human Rights have been consistently reluctant to make a case for pushing for same-sex marriage on constitutional or human rights grounds, referring to it as a political decision instead.⁴⁴

On the question of the position of European countries in relation to homosexuality, a world-wide comparative survey from 2003 is of particular interest.⁴⁵ The People-Press comments that: "Openness toward homosexuality is most widespread in the Western European nations of France, Britain, Italy and Germany, where more say homosexuality should be accepted by society than not by well over three-to-one."⁴⁶ Canada comes as the only competitor to this top-league of the survey, but still lags behind Italy. The Czech Republic comes to the most pro-acceptance rate together with Germany (83% think homosexuality should be accepted by society), Poland comes well behind (40%), while in Turkey and Russia vast majorities oppose this view (only 22% in favour in both countries). Within the Western European countries included in this sample, a surprise could be the near to equal results for each country. In particular, the results in the UK (74-22) and Italy (72-20) show exactly the same differential while Italy is often referred to as being "behind" not only in legal, but also social acceptance of homosexuality.⁴⁷

⁴¹ 1994 Roth resolution on equal rights for homosexuals and lesbians in the European Community, OJ 1994 C 61/40, Resolution no A3 0028/94, 8/02/1994; European Parliament, Human rights in the EU, 16/03/2000; European Parliament, Provisional Edition: Basic rights in the EU (2001), 15/01/2003.

⁴² For a critical report, see Joke Swiebel, MEP in IGLY. *Mind the Gap – Gay and Lesbian youth on the border of EU accession*. 18/01/2002, pp. 11-13. This edition also gives a good overview of the very diverse situations and developments in social acceptance throughout Central and East European countries.

⁴³ Treaty of European Union, article 13.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Daniel Borillo. "La construction juridique du corps d'exception homosexuel." (*Collectif Les Mots Sont Importants*, May 2006). http://lmsi.net/article.php3?id_article=242

⁴⁵ Pew Research Center Report, November 18, 2003, <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=765>, also Global Attitudes Project, Views of a changing world, June 2003, p. 114f., which we referred to above: Report November 18, 2003, see <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=765>

⁴⁶ Ibid: 7

⁴⁷ This is the view defended by most Italian lesbian and gay respondents within the interview sample.

These observations provide a context within which the choice of a field for the empirical part of this research is situated. The four countries that have been chosen, and the four capitals within them, are representative of a comparatively high degree of acceptance of homosexuality. In this sense, to a certain extent at least, it seems to indicate support for the choice of considering the capitals of these four countries as a coherent field to study the phenomenon of the link between social and legal acceptance in Europe.

Overall, in considering the facts of legal recognition, there are strong grounds to single out a European trend - as opposed to a general Western development - that has created a momentum towards the recognition of same-sex couples over the last fifteen years. It remains unclear whether the dynamic of this trend will continue, and whether developments elsewhere - for example in the US - will move in a similar direction in the long run. However, for the research undertaken in this project, the placing of the European trend in a Western or global context is necessary as part of a larger framework, but is not essential to the analysis of the social change itself. Instead, the project is based on the understanding of this trend within a pan-European social space that will, to a large extent, be taken for granted despite the obvious differences and contradictions that can be singled out. In particular, the limits of this trend within Europe, i.e. whether it should be seen as a specifically EU, Western European, Northern European, or as has sometimes been claimed (but not very convincingly so) a Protestant European trend,⁴⁸ will not be the main concern. Instead, a focus on those areas where the trend seems to have reached an interesting degree of recognition - Germany, France, the UK and, more controversially, Italy - will deliberately be chosen as its rationale. Here, a second question arises as to the relevance of the legal phenomenon in relation to broader changes in social norms.

1.1.2. Social and legal recognition: laws that follow norms or norms that follow laws?

How should the link between social and legal acceptance be analysed? To be sure, it is not always clear what comes first in the relationship between social and legal recognition.

Let us first consider the view that legislation follows social changes.

⁴⁸ E.g. Flora Leroy-Forgeot. *Histoire juridique de l'homosexualité en Europe*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), p. 63

Undoubtedly, these legal developments are preceded and/or accompanied by the growing social acceptance of homosexuality and homosexual lifestyles that has been noted in various surveys on views on homosexuality. Already the 1993 Eurobarometer, a special edition on family and related issues, as one of the most in depth EU-wide survey on attitudes towards homosexuality and same-sex couples, citing a report on the family in Europe, notes that "the gay, lesbian or homosexual couple [...] is increasingly better recognized in some of these countries."⁴⁹ In this sense it seems consistent to argue that the trend towards legal recognition is symptomatic of changing social norms. Indeed, many governmental positions on the recognition of same-sex couples included social changes in acceptance as the main argument for reforms.⁵⁰

Two different but overlapping views on legislation following social change can be given: either the democratic process simply implements public opinion in the long run, or the acceptance in public opinion prepares the ground for the viability of policy suggestions from different actors within the policy making process. Under the first view, voters over time pick programmes that imply the policy changes which go in the direction of majority norms. Under the second, politicians "dare" to propose policies once they see their (potential) viability within society. This view provides more room to account for social movements, pressure groups and other policy actors. Usually, at least to a certain extent, both these influences of social acceptance are simultaneously present in legislative decision making processes.

The view that laws follow norms seems to be intuitively correct. Surely legislators react to social changes and respond to claims that are seen as justified by the majority of the population. However, at the same time, there seems to be an interaction between the two that is not as clear cut as one might think. Let us consider the case that the legal changes impact on social norms and the acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex partnerships.

Looking again at the example of the 1993 Eurobarometer one can see that at this earlier stage prior to the development of more wide-spread legal recognition of any sort, the opening up of marriage to same-sex couples was only approved by the majority of respondents in the

⁴⁹ Eurobaromètre 39.0: "Les Européens et la Famille" (Brussels, December 1993): 93. Original: "La relation gay, lesbienne ou homosexuelle [...] est de mieux en mieux reconnue dans certains de ces pays."

⁵⁰ The Belgian government put its rationale in this light: "Mentalities having evolved, there is not any reason left not to open [marriage] to people of the same sex." (Belgian government statement, 30/01/2003. Original: "Les mentalités ayant évolué, il n'y a plus aucune raison de ne pas ouvrir [le mariage] aux personnes du même sexe.")

Netherlands and Denmark⁵¹, i.e. the only two countries where a form of legal recognition already existed. On the question of granting equal benefits (without marriage) to same-sex couples, respondents from the Netherlands, Denmark and Spain were those who respond with a favourable majority.⁵² However, Spanish public opinion is only later reflected in the governmental policies. Portugal, in contrast, had soon after this introduced a very basic form of legal recognition. Yet in this survey, it figures as the very last country to favour equal rights for same-sex couples: only around 20% were favourable and two-thirds of the respondents were against *any* rights being granted to same-sex couples.⁵³ The Gallup Europe report in 2003 concludes that support to same-sex partnership rights is higher where legislation has already been passed: "[C]ountries having already adapted their legislation [according rights to homosexual couples] show a rate of agreement superior to countries having yet to pass any new measures."⁵⁴ This general observation accounts for the large majorities favourable to same-sex marriage in Nordic and Benelux countries, and Germany and France (all between 56 and 82% of positive opinions on homosexual marriage).⁵⁵

This, of course, does not necessarily contradict the first view in which legislation is adapted to social norms over time. Instead, it can be claimed that combinations of political interests and legalistic or pragmatic approaches to controversial issues in general can guide governmental reforms and in turn influence public opinion and conceptions of what is to be seen as 'normal' or acceptable. It seems reasonable to argue that, in the case of the recognition of same-sex couples, changing social norms and legal changes develop dynamics that interact reflexively. A brief analysis of the reception of the *Pacs* in France can serve as a useful example here, before turning to the normative influence of both shifts in norms and law as references for identity construction.

⁵¹ Eurobaromètre 39.0: "Les Européens et la Famille" (Brussels, December 1993), p. 94

⁵² Ibid: 96

⁵³ Ibid: 93ff. While Portugal has the most opposed position as to equal rights in this survey, on marriage it has the second most opposed after Greece: "[...] Greece and Portugal, two countries where, overall, two thirds of the respondents say that homosexuals should not have any of the rights spelled out above." (Original: "la Grèce et le Portugal, deux pays où, dans l'ensemble, deux tiers des répondants déclarent que les homosexuels ne devraient avoir aucun des droits spécifiés plus haut.")

⁵⁴ Gallup Europe, "Homosexual marriage, child adoption by homosexual couples: is the public ready?" Gallup Europe 2003, see www.eosgallupeurope.com

⁵⁵ Ibid.

1.1.3. The Pacs: a success story in public opinion

The French case of the Pacs shows that there was a sharp increase in the acceptance of homosexuality during the legislative debate, which reached its peak in the opinion polls organized following the introduction of the Pacs. In opinion polls held in 1998, at the very beginning of the legislative process, only a very small and relative majority of 49% was in favour of such a reform.⁵⁶ These figures indeed constituted one of the reasons why the Jospin government was extremely careful to push for a substantive granting of rights to same-sex couples; the governmental support of the reform was indeed viewed as too hesitant for many advocates of the Pacs.⁵⁷ Two years later, positive views on the Pacs reached 70% and the centre-right majority which came to power in 2002 at no point contemplated going back on the reform its members had previously fiercely combated. Instead, government members are quoted as supporting the Pacs in its present form or as seeking to extend its legal consequences.⁵⁸ In this sense it seems that "[The Pacs] has entered the norm" ("est entré dans les mœurs")⁵⁹ through its legal existence.

It has been argued that by putting homosexuality and same-sex couples on the political agenda, the perception of lesbian and gay lifestyles has changed. For some, taboos were broken and social norms revised. Patrick Bloche, one of the two authors of the Pacs, explained:

Patrick Bloche, French MP, co-author of the "PaCS" law proposal (Personal interview, 2000)

We had a real societal debate taking place in Parliament, taking place outside of Parliament, in the media, in French society. [...] The Pacs had become a topic of discussion among people. [...] And no doubt we had to break down some barriers through this central debate on the Pacs, to make homosexuality a real topic of public debate, and to break some existing taboos.⁶⁰

A firmer acceptance of homosexuality has also been noted in opinion polls between 2003 and 2006. Most of them indicated solid majorities in favour of same-sex marriages, i.e. supporting to extend rights beyond the Pacs.⁶¹ Growing acceptance of homosexuality cannot only be

⁵⁶ *Libération*, 18/10/00.

⁵⁷ See e.g. Borrillo and Lascoumes (2002), *Amours égales*, p. 60ff; also p. 33. See also : Frédéric Martel, 'Le Gouvernement et le pacs (2)' in Gérard Ignasse (ed.), *Les pacsé-e-s*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), pp 169f.

⁵⁸ See *Le Monde*, 14/04/2003. Also: Charlotte Rotman. "La droite prête à améliorer le Pacs pour ne pas accorder le mariage homosexuel." *Le Monde*, 21/02/2006.

⁵⁹ Pierre-Eric Spitz, former member of the French Ministry of Justice, in Gérard Ignasse (2002), *Les pacsé-e-s*, p. 167.

⁶⁰ Patrick Bloche, personal interview, 20/10/2000. Original: "On a eu un vrai débat de société, qui s'est déroulé à l'Assemblée, qui s'est déroulé en dehors de l'Assemblée, dans les médias, dans la société française. [...] Le Pacs était devenu un sujet de discussion entre les gens. [...] Et on avait sans doute, à travers ce débat central du Pacs, à faire sauter des verrous, à faire de l'homosexualité un vrai sujet de débat public et à faire tomber quelques tabous qu'il y avait encore."

⁶¹ E.g. in a Têtu/Sofres survey : 61% in favour, *Nouvel Observateur*, 22/06/06.

observed concerning legal changes, but also in attitudes towards the direct social environment. In a TNS-Sofres survey, more than a third of respondents say they would not be “displeased” to know of their son to be homosexual, a clear increase from numbers well below 10% in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶²

The case of such an overall “success story” in public opinion, at least with regard to the trend towards acceptance, suggests that legal changes and awareness of them through public debates can in turn change social norms, sometimes at a fast pace. The interactive influence of the legal and the political spheres on the one hand, and the social sphere on the other, need to be taken into account when considering the impact on identity construction and the experiences of acceptance or rejection that can accompany them.

Undoubtedly, visibility plays a role in the reviewing or reconsidering of social norms. In the case of the debates on same-sex partnership, such debates as well as the legislation itself largely contributed to the visibility of homosexual lifestyles. To a certain degree then, a factual legal norm can ultimately also create a form of ‘normality’ that may have been denied (more firmly) before. As another symbolic example of this, one can point to the unprecedented public declarations of homosexuality by the two candidates for the post of mayor in Paris and Berlin, Bertrand Delanoë and Klaus Wowereit, at the time as the reforms were being debated in both countries, and their subsequent election in 2000 and 2001. Numerous examples followed suit in the political and cultural realms in the UK, Italy, France and Germany, where public visibility has significantly increased in developments that have mirrored one another in these countries. The French case considered here as an example may be particular in this context due to the scope of the debate and its overwhelming presence in the media for two years, but the more fundamental question posed is that of the interaction between state recognition, social norms, and the individual’s perception of the two.

For this study, the importance of these observations lies in the appropriation of perceived new norms by individual lesbian women or gay men – in what way do they feel affected by the changes and debates?

⁶² TNS Sofres - Nouvel Observateur survey, *Nouvel Observateur*, 23/06/06.

1.1.4. Self-construction in the light of social and legal recognition

Irrespective of the question as to whether legal or social recognition comes first, their combined effect nonetheless changes norms for individual identity construction. The observation of this interplay between forms of recognition and projection into a homosexual lifeplan therefore constitutes the inquiry of this study. Since the advent of these legal and social changes, lesbian and gay identities have been constructed within a different normative framework.

In the words of two representatives of lesbian and gay youth groups, the changes can cause a shift in their identities and the way they will live their sexualities. Through the French debate on the *Pacs*, they have seen a shift in how young homosexuals project themselves into partnership and homosexual life styles:

Binh Castel (MAG) and Isabelle Marchand, (DEGEL), Paris, personal interview, 2000.⁶³

B. C.: I think that it has allowed for launching societal debates a bit everywhere, not only on TV but also in families, and concretely it translates into us receiving many young people here, and increasingly younger ones. I'm not sure if there is a link, but this has occurred since this question has been in the media. Perhaps because there is an [increasing] awareness, it's an acceptance that is easier and above all a symbolic recognition of homosexuals' lives and that of the homosexual couple. [...]

I.M.: I think that it makes it easier for them to project themselves into the future and to perhaps re-envisage a family life that they had given up on, or the idea of the couple.

The hypothesis defended here is that the political debate over the legal change, through the visibility it created, has in the last instance provided for an easier lesbian or gay life project, as Isabelle argues ("makes it easier for them to project themselves into the future"). The type of project is specified as one that allows for "re-envisaging" a "family life" and "the idea of the couple": in other terms, partnership and children as life options become possible through the experience of acceptance. Taking both Binh's and Isabelle's accounts, the recognition of factual lifestyles and the new and easier options for identity constructions are both a consequence of the legal and social changes, combined with the fact that increasing numbers of younger teenagers come to join their associations.

⁶³ Binh Castel, Mouvement d’Affirmation des Jeunes Gais et lesbiennes (MAG) and Isabelle Marchand, Debout Etudiants Gais et lesbiennes (DEGEL), interview in Paris on 29/06/2000. Original: "B.C.: Je pense que ça a permis de lancer des débats de société un peu partout, pas seulement à la télé mais aussi dans les familles et concrètement ça se traduit, je ne sais pas si s’est lié, mais depuis que cette question est médiatisée on reçoit beaucoup de jeunes, encore plus jeunes en fait. Peut-être parce qu’il y a une prise de conscience, c’est une acceptation plus facile et surtout une reconnaissance symbolique de l’état des homosexuels et du couple homosexuel. [...] I. M.: Je pense que ça les adoucit à se projeter dans l’avenir et peut-être à ré-envisager une vie de famille, qu’ils avaient abandonnée, ou à l’idée du couple."

Jason, one of the respondents in the fieldwork, illustrates such a hypothesis through his choices after sixteen years of marriage to a woman during which he had occasional male lovers. After his divorce, he conceives of a radically different vision of living his homosexuality.

Jason (London, 47)

J: During the years when I was married, it was different, I wasn't looking for a relationship, I was looking for casual sex. So, yeah, meet people on the internet, in saunas, bars, whatever.

FJ: And, when you, when you met your partner now, was it clear from the beginning that you wanted a relationship, or did you first meet in another way. – Or how did that happen?

J: Well, we had that discussion, actually the first time we met, yes. – We were both looking for a relationship. [...] It wasn't quite love at first sight, but almost.

Jason's account, which coincides with the introduction of civil partnership in the UK in 2005, clearly outlines two different ways of living his homosexual desires: "casual sex" with men during his heterosexual marriage, and "looking for a relationship", which resulted in a four month relationship at the time of the interview. In Jason's case, the change in constructing his gay identity around the idea of "a relationship" coincided with the observation of a change in the social acceptance of homosexuality, where he points to public personalities as a factor in changing attitudes:

Jason (London, 47)

You've only got to look at British television and see the number of people who are openly gay hosting shows or whatever and you know it's completely acceptable. The fact that cabinet ministers in our government had stood up and said that they're openly gay has also been a significant factor in changing people's attitudes.

Jason, as other interviewees in this study, links up the public perception of homosexuality, debates about gay and lesbian marriage and the social acceptance of homosexuality. How are these linked to personal appropriation of choices in identity construction on the level of the individual? How do lesbians and gays adapt their lifestyle strategies to the observation of these kinds of changes in social norms? Justin's case can serve as a formulation for a hypothesis here, i.e. that the referential framework in social norms has provided him with a different basis for his choices in the construction of his sexuality-related identity. We will return to Jason's narrative in chapter 6 and review the results of the inquiry in the light of his and other interviews.

The overall change has been characterised as both a legal and political event, present in public debates, with large media coverage, and sometimes stretching over several years. The media

debates on homosexuality have covered various aspects of public life in most European countries at the time of this study. As mentioned above, in many cases, the trend towards recognition has been accompanied by the Coming out or Outings of public personalities, e.g. politicians in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, etc. Within a couple of years, the public acknowledgment of homosexuality, as it seems, has become of little importance for MPs, ministers, mayors, party leaders and heads of regional administration, or has even turned into a bonus factor in election campaigns and a part of party strategies.⁶⁴

In broader terms the media have played a major role in the change in how homosexuality is perceived. As far as films and TV series - often referred to in the interviews - are concerned, the national context is much more blurred than in the legal and political debates, and often US films and film and TV productions are referred to, which form part of a cultural reference frame.

Léa (Paris, 30)

L: [People] are more used to seeing homosexual couples and all of that because we hide less, and because they talk a lot about it on TV. In any case, it's simple: you watch all the soap operas they are showing at the moment, there's always a gay guy in the series. In movies it's the same. So, it's really about being more present in the media. So, obviously, it gets more into people's mentalities. But I think it's not accepted yet as it should be.

FJ: On TV such as what for example?

L: The soap operas? [...] Well, all the series for young people, in *Friends*, in *Dawson's Creek* [...] in *Aly McBeal*, in all the soaps that you see there are gays now.

FJ: Are there French soaps?

L: Well, French soaps, well I don't watch French soaps.⁶⁵

TV and film culture forms a crucial part of the social trend, and, as in the quote above, is often detached from the national debates as such, but instead reflects a globalized Western image of

⁶⁴ Commenting on the victory of Nichi Vendola as the President of the Region Puglia (Southern Italy): "Let's say it: Nichi Vendola's electoral success in Puglia has launched a new trend: in Politics, gay is beautiful, very beautiful. Or even more: it wins." B. Jerkov in *Venerdì di Repubblica*, 15/04/2005: 45. (Original: "Diciamolo, il successo elettorale di Nichi Vendola in Puglia ha lanciato un nuovo trend: in politica, gay è bello, bellissimo. Anzi di più: vince.") Also, on the British Conservatives now embracing the idea of openly gay politicians, Alan Duncan, openly gay Tory MP, says: "We [the Tories] are in favour of having a fair share of them, you know, black, women, gay: great. That is after all society. But I think until I did it, they were really trying to do it, but they didn't quite know what it was about or why or how. [...] I just decided the time is ripe." (Self-conducted interview, London, 16/12/2004)

⁶⁵ Original: "L: [Les gens] sont plus habitués à voir des couples homosexuels et tout ça parce que on se cache moins. Et parce qu'on en parle beaucoup à la télé. De toute façon, c'est simple, tu regardes toutes les séries qui passent en ce moment, il y a un homo dans la série. Dans les films c'est pareil. Donc c'est vraiment que c'est beaucoup plus médiatisé. Donc forcément ça rentre plus dans la mentalité des gens. Mais je pense que ce n'est pas encore accepté comme ça devrait l'être. - FJ : A la télé comme quoi par exemple ? - L : Les séries ? [...] Pff, toutes les séries de jeunes là, dans *Friends*, dans *Dawson* [*Dawson's Creeks*] [...] dans *Aly McBeal*, dans toutes les séries que tu vois maintenant il y a des homos. - FJ : Est-ce qu'il y a des séries françaises ? - L : Alors, séries françaises, ben séries françaises, je ne les regarde pas."

homosexuality with the trend to incorporating homosexual love stories into mainstream culture, such as Hollywood films.⁶⁶ In this context, it is interesting to note Léa's reaction to the question about French TV series: concerning the prevalence of such a globalized image of gay and lesbian lifestyles, for Léa, the reference to media images from her own country seems far fetched.

National debates, legal changes, public personalities and media representations together form a referential context for the norms in identity construction. And all these, in different ways, have undergone a profound change towards a more widely accepted view on openly gay and lesbian identities. As a result, the representation of homosexuality has been transformed. There can be no doubt that the referential framework has changed. But the question remains as to how these changes should be interpreted. Indeed, there are conflicting interpretations: for some, they are seen as a form of acceptance or normalisation, either symbolic or real, a symptom of progress or liberalisation, for others they represent a conservative backlash towards a revival of marriage through its extension into gay and lesbian lifestyles, and for yet others as a perversion of too permissive societies. However, once the transformations became an established reality, the ideological fronts in the European version of the "gay marriage war"⁶⁷ largely gave way to a truce and an attitude of complacency about the apparent social consensus.⁶⁸ Not everywhere, but even in those countries which have not moved towards partnership recognition, a sense of "lagging behind" has developed.⁶⁹

In conclusion, the two elements on which the preceding section has concentrated, i.e. the advent of the legal recognition of same-sex couples on the one hand, and the social recognition of homosexuality on the other, are seen as fundamentally connected. From the legal perspective, the recognition of same-sex couples has become a fact in a multitude of European

⁶⁶ *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), the triple Oscar-winning film by Ang Lee, has often been referred to as symptomatic of the completion of a mainstream-turn concerning homosexuality on the screen. See e.g. Joanna Weiss in *The Boston Globe*, 11/12/2005: "There is a solid argument to be made that 'Brokeback Mountain' is the first mainstream American film to portray gay love straightforwardly -- not in the context of an issue film about AIDS, not as a campy side plot, but as old-fashioned melodrama, with moony eyes and explicit sex." For a good concise overview of the cinematographic image of homosexuality, in both major US American and European films, see Pier Maria Bocchi. "Cinema." Daniele Del Pozzo and Luca Scarlini. *Gay. La guida italiana in 150 voci*. (Milano: Mondadori, 2006: 54-58).

⁶⁷ Richard Mohr. "The stakes in the gay-marriage wars." Robert M. Baird and Stewart E. Rosenbaum (eds.). *Same-sex marriage: The moral and legal debate*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997: 104-107)

⁶⁸ Recent reaffirmation of positions by the Catholic Church, esp. in Spain but also by J. Ratzinger, could be seen as counter-evidence to this. However, within the Western European political context overall, I believe that, *once introduced* on the national level, one can speak of such a consensus on legal recognition.

countries - mostly in "Western" European countries and in different institutional settings ranging from cohabitation rights and registered partnership to marriage. The social change in the acceptance and recognition of homosexual lifestyles can be observed in a multitude of cultural elements, through opinion polls and importantly in its media representations. As has been argued here, the legal changes reflect the social changes and in turn affect the social acceptance and representation of homosexuality. They therefore jointly form the starting point for a sociological inquiry into the interconnectedness of these changes in the social realities of gays and lesbians.

1.1.5. An increasing amount of research on homosexuality

On the side of academic research similarly, important changes have taken place with regards to homosexuality as an object of study. Many lawyers and social scientists, often after initial hesitations to include the *niche* subject of homosexuality in their research agendas, have started to show greater interest in the topic. The inclusion of same-sex couples into mainstream sociology of the family or family law proves that academia has also responded to the trend. Indeed, the field of study is in full-blown expansion. Numerous scholars have focused on comparative legal studies on the partnership institutions within the EU and elsewhere, as the literature review will demonstrate. Sociologists have increasingly begun to look at homosexuality in ways that go beyond the study of sexuality. Gay and lesbian couples and families, as a research topic, have taken foot in sociology departments across Western Europe. This research itself is equally proof of it.

While legal studies have repeatedly put an emphasis on the European and comparative perspectives on the topic,⁷⁰ mainstream sociological studies have most often been confined to the national arena, within which the differences e.g. between cities and rural areas have often been pointed out.⁷¹

⁶⁹ See e.g. E. Menzione in P. Paterlini. *Matrimoni*. (Torino: Einaudi, 2004), p. 184: "Italy is really the very last in the queue concerning positive rights for homosexuals" (Original: "L'Italia è veramente il fanalino di coda in tema di diritti positivi degli omosessuali.")

⁷⁰ On the European legal dimension, both EU and comparative, e.g. Kees Waaldijk. "Comparative Overview." and "Comparative Analysis." in "More or Less Together: Levels of legal consequences of marriage, cohabitation and registered partnership for different-sex and same-sex partners: A comparative study of nine European countries." (Paris: Institut National d'Études Démographiques, *Documents de travail No 125*, 2005).

⁷¹ For example Bochow, Michael. *Schwules Leben in der Provinz. Zum Beispiel Niedersachsen*. (Berlin: Sigma, 1998) City-country theme in the broad national perspectives: e.g. Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*, or Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), *Same-sex intimacies*.

1.2. Current literature and research review

There are various developments in legal, sociological, philosophical, psychological, historical and more broadly cultural studies that are relevant to the question posed here. More specifically however, this doctoral study builds on a range of sociological studies in the field of homosexuality and same-sex partnership that are directly linked to the contemporary analysis of gay and lesbian identities and gay and lesbian experiences of stigma, acceptance, recognition or rejection, such as in works by Jeffrey Weeks, Marzio Barbagli, or Didier Eribon. To clarify how this research positions itself within the field, a broad and exemplifying overview of the field will be given in the first instance,. Following on from this, some highly relevant studies will be looked at, where it will be spelled out in what way this study relates to them.

After these brief reviews of the literature on homosexuality and same-sex couples, the overview will turn the principal studies that can be identified as providing a wider framework to the studies, such as sociology of the family, the couple and love, and studies on deviance, identity and individualisation.

In reviewing the literature relevant to the research topic, it is necessary to point out the various fields, approaches and different geographical foci of the studies. Literature on the legal and social changes in Europe, and to a lesser extent in the US, will be noted, while US literature proves to be dominant in sociological and psychological studies on homosexuality. Within recent years however, there has been a significant increase in sociological literature on the topic of homosexuality in European countries. The works outlined here are intended to exemplify the fields of research on homosexuality, with a focus on those most closely related to the research approach and the geographical scope of the study. It will hence not cover the variety of studies in the respective countries in a balanced way. Micro-sociological studies in particular will be referred to, where certain works will be taken to exemplify recent development in the field, in particular as to methodological choices. Specific social and political theory approaches to the research question are another focus of the review of current literature, as they are seen as equally crucial to the research design of this study.

1.2.1. Literature on homosexuality and same-sex couples

The field of literature on homosexuality and same-sex couples can be divided into five approaches which are sometimes closely interlinked, but are generally based on different starting points. These are 1) the legal perspective, 2) normative approaches/ political philosophy, 3) historical and cultural approaches, 4) micro-sociological studies on lesbian and gay life, 5) social psychology, psychological and psychoanalytical approaches. The empirical part of this project follows a micro-sociological approach. The legal and historical/cultural perspectives form the necessary context for understanding the social and legal conditions of homosexuality. Yet again, a good knowledge of the debates in political philosophy is essential for the study of the normative discourses that form an important part of the empirical work for this study on gay and lesbian discourses on the recognition of same-sex couples.

1.2.1.1. Legal perspectives

As regards the legal context of same-sex recognition, many new publications have appeared in recent years following the legal developments in Europe. An outstanding collection here is the comprehensive edition by Robert Wintemut and Mads Andenaes, Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Partnerships (2001).⁷² Due to the fast pace of legal changes in this field, this type of case study often seems like a historical spotlight shone on the legal details at a specific point in time. From this volume, a short article by Janet Halley is particularly useful in our context due to its review of the rhetoric of the same-sex marriage debate.⁷³

Kees Waaldijk has published and co-authored various extremely useful legal studies on same-sex couples and sexual identity in Europe, with both comparative and EU perspectives. In "More or less together",⁷⁴ he provides a useful classification of existing partnership laws and the level of legal implications they represent. The resulting scale indicates the degrees of

⁷² Wintemute and Andenaes, eds. (2001), *Legal Recognition*. This volume comprises articles on both theoretical approaches and a world wide selection of case studies on the legal status of same-sex couples. See also Yuval Merin. *Equality for same-sex Couples*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) on the legal state of the art in the US and Europe and Katharina Boele-Woelki and Angelika Fuchs (eds.). *Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Couples in Europe*. (Oxford: Intersentia, 2003). On the US context, Michael Wald offers a wide analysis of the issues involved for same-sex couples in Michael Wald. "Same-Sex Couples: Marriage, Families, and Children." (Stanford Law School, *Public Law and Legal Theory Working Paper* No. 6, 1999) Online version: <http://lawschool.stanford.edu/faculty/wald>

⁷³ Janet Halley. "Recognition, Rights, Regulation, Normalisation: Rhetorics of Justification in the Same-Sex Marriage Debate." Wintemute and Andenaes, eds. (2001), *Legal Recognition*: 97-111.

⁷⁴ Kees Waaldijk (2005), "Comparative Analysis."

partnership recognition in different models of civil partnership and same-sex marriage, pointing to the different levels of legal implications of institutions such as the *Pacs* or the *Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft*, or yet again to the substantive legal consequences of cohabitation for couples in the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries. The intentionally simplified quantification of legal consequences points to the proportion of legal consequences that same-sex couples are denied when compared to married partners of the opposite sex. In doing so it serves as a clear reminder of inequality between same-sex and opposite-sex couples. Thus in Germany a registered same-sex couple obtains 68% of the legal consequences measured by the standards of heterosexual marriage, a status it is not allowed to accede to. In France a same-sex couple who signs a *Pacs* remains at 55% only of the legal consequences of marriage, while the versions of registered partnership in Sweden (91%) and Denmark (84%) are much closer to marriage in their legal consequences.⁷⁵

On the legal situation in the UK, a large number of publications have accompanied the new civil partnership law. One broad legal overview is Mark Harper, Martin Downs, Katherine Landells and Gerald Wilson, *Civil Partnership* (2005).⁷⁶

From a critical perspective, which highlights the insufficiencies of the present reforms such as the *Pacs*, Daniel Borrillo offers a good analysis in his article 'Pluralisme conjugal ou hiérarchie des sexualités: la reconnaissance juridique des couples homosexuels dans l'Union européenne' (2001).⁷⁷ Borrillo has published several books on the French context; on the legal aspects *Homosexualité et droit* (1999)⁷⁸ can be cited. One can also point at Caroline Mécary, who has published an overview of the French legal context: *Droit et homosexualité*, (2000).⁷⁹ In *Histoire juridique de l'homosexualité en Europe* (1997)⁸⁰, Flora Leroy-Forgeot gives a interesting overview of the broad traits of legal rationales in Europe from ancient times to Christianity and modern Europe, although the attempt to provide a contemporary European comparative analysis remains very incomplete..⁸¹

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁶ Mark Harper, Martin Downs, Katharine Landells and Gerald Wilson. *Civil Partnership*. (Bristol: Jordan, 2005)

⁷⁷ Borrillo, Daniel. "Pluralisme conjugal ou hiérarchie des sexualités: la reconnaissance juridique des couples homosexuels dans l'Union européenne." (*Revue de droit McGill*, October 2001)

⁷⁸ Daniel Borrillo. *Homosexualité et droit*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999)

⁷⁹ Caroline Mécary. *Droit et homosexualité*. (Paris: Dalloz, 2000)

⁸⁰ Leroy-Forgeot (1997), *Histoire juridique*.

⁸¹ Michael Wald. "Same-Sex Couples: Marriage, Families, and Children." (Stanford Law School, *Public Law and Legal Theory Working Paper* No. 6, 1999) Online version: <http://lawschool.stanford.edu/faculty/wald>. Also e.g. Mark Strasser. *Legally Wed: Same-Sex Marriage and the Constitution*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997)

These studies merely exemplify the presence of works on national developments, comparative European studies, as well as works on the legal context in the US. Analysing the legal differences and legal implications in different European countries in depth would be too vast an enterprise to be part of the contextual work on the questions addressed in this research. As the analysis of the fieldwork and the theoretical chapter on the concept of recognition will show, the differences and (alleged) insufficiency of institutions that recognize same-sex couples will be included only to the extent that they enter the discourses encountered in the fieldwork, from the point of view of the individual. The legal background to the continuing inequalities between the rights to which couples can accede is however important to clarify, and links into the normative question of injustice and discrimination. Inequality and discrimination of same-sex partnerships are fundamental observations in the normative debates on the question of homosexuality.

1.2.1.2. Normative approaches, political philosophy, political debates

The liberal perspective on the question of homosexuality can be traced back to classical liberal positions such as Jeremy Bentham's, who explicitly explored the question from a utilitarian point of view of toleration. Summarizing this view, consenting sexual activity should not be prohibited by the state as it causes no threat and therefore should not be criminalized by the law.⁸² Bentham did not specify whether homosexuality should or should not be regarded as morally *bad* in itself. This could of course be seen as an implicit statement that it is not *bad* indeed. In contemporary debates however, the position of toleration is generally regarded as too weak, as it implies a moral inferiority of what is to be tolerated.

In current debates within political philosophy, one can note a variety of contributions that discuss the connections between liberal philosophy, linking concepts of equality, toleration, state neutrality, self-respect and pluralism to the question of state recognition of same-sex partnerships. For a good overview of the arguments involved in the debate within a liberal framework, there is A.E. Galeotti's Toleration as recognition (2002),⁸³ which includes a chapter dedicated the question of same-sex marriage. Galeotti outlines the positions against same-sex marriage in conservative, certain liberal and subversive (anti-marriage) positions, defending her liberal argument for same-sex marriages as being based on equal respect.

⁸² Jeremy Bentham, *Offences Against One's Self*. [1785, unpublished. First published in 1978] (*Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol 3:4 and 4:1, 1978)

⁸³ Anna Elisabetta Galeotti. *Toleration as recognition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Various liberal authors argue that the exclusion of homosexuals from the institution of marriage is a denial of equality, such as for example in the elaborate publications by Ralph Wedgwood (1999),⁸⁴ Alex Wellington (1995),⁸⁵ and William Eskridge (1996).⁸⁶ Nuances in this position concern, in particular, the question as to whether it is because a person is lesbian or gay that equality requires equal access to institutions, or whether it is the conception of life in a same-sex couple that should be put on an equal footing with heterosexual life plans.⁸⁷ The latter is based either on the view that it is equally compatible with fundamental values that the state should defend, such as autonomy or self-construction in forms of intimate commitment,⁸⁸ or that the state should be neutral towards different conceptions of the good life.⁸⁹

Liberal views that argue against an opening up of the institution of marriage, and which are also given as government positions in the French and German reforms, are based on the understanding that marriage in its role of providing certain social conditions for children's education is defined by procreation and thereby seen in its very logic as limited to opposite sex partnerships. Such a reasoning that defends recognition of some form, but not within marriage, has been articulated at various points in the French political debate on the Pacs, such as e.g. by the French centre-right politician Roselyne Bachelot⁹⁰. An author who defended what one could call a conservative liberal position on the question (in the French Pacs debate) is e.g. the philosopher Guy Coq, who argues that, in contrast to marriage, same-sex partnerships should be considered a purely private matter.⁹¹ In contrast to this, the controversial right-wing politician Christine Boutin, still in the French context, can be cited as an example of a conservative anti-homosexuality position that refers to a traditional order of society.⁹² For a discussion of the juxtaposition of liberal views on same-sex marriage and illiberal positions

⁸⁴ Ralph Wedgwood. "The Fundamental Argument for Same-Sex Marriage." (*The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 7/3, 1999: 225-242)

⁸⁵ Alex A. Wellington. "Why liberals should support same-sex marriage." (*Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 26 1995: 5-32)

⁸⁶ William N. Eskridge. *The Case for Same-Sex Marriage*. New York, Free Press, 1996.

⁸⁷ On this point, Mohr (1997), "The Stakes."

⁸⁸ Such as based on Raz' perfectionist liberalism: Joseph Raz. *The Morality of Freedom*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), see Wedgwood (1999), "Fundamental Argument", p. 225. On the value of marriage as love and commitment, see e.g. François Dagognet, "La famille sans la nature: une politique de la morale contre le moralisme" in Borrillo, Fassin and Iacub. *Au-delà du PaCS*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999: 79-86)

⁸⁹ For neutrality of the state, see Jeremy Waldron, *Liberal Rights*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, and Jörgens (2002), *Pacs, marriage*.

⁹⁰ Roselyne Bachelot. *Le PACS entre haine et amour*. (Paris: Plon, 1999)

⁹¹ See e.g. Guy Coq, "Un PaCS antisocial." (*Le Banquet*, Vol. 12/13, 1998: 177-191)

⁹² Christine Boutin. *Le "mariage" des homosexuels ?* (Paris, Critérion, 1998)

from a global perspective, a good recent overview is given by Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann (2001).⁹³

Finally, the queer⁹⁴ and left anti-marriage positions should be spelled out. It is important to highlight the literature that views the inclusion of lesbians and gays into marriage structures from either a critical lesbian, gay, feminist, subversive or queer perspective. Various texts could be mentioned here, e.g. Michael Warner's Trouble with normal (1999),⁹⁵ Henning Bech's When men meet (1997),⁹⁶ or David Halperin's Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography (1995)⁹⁷ and How to do the History of Homosexuality (2002).⁹⁸ For a critical overview of recent developments in queer theory, see e.g. Adam Isaiah Green's article (2002)⁹⁹ or, more broadly, Steven Seidman's edition Queer Theory/Sociology (1996)¹⁰⁰. An important text that (critically) relates to queer theory debates which will be referred to is Leo Bersani's Homos (1995).¹⁰¹ A good overview of various positions in the German context, in particular including feminist anti-marriage arguments, albeit at an earlier stage of the debate, is given in Klaus Laabs' edition, Lesben. Schwule. Standesamt. Die Debatte um die Homoehe (1991).¹⁰² For an anti-marriage position, among several texts one can refer to Claudia Card's article 'Against Marriage' (1997)¹⁰³ or, in the German context again, to Ilona Bubeck's Unser Stück vom Kuchen (2000)¹⁰⁴. In addition to the more specifically homosexual queer approaches, the gender dimension in the study of homosexuality forms an important field of research. Judith Butler's Gender Trouble (1990)¹⁰⁵ and Undoing Gender (2004)¹⁰⁶ are crucial as dominant references from a gender (and queer) perspective.

⁹³ Howard-Hassmann (2001), "Liberal and Illiberal."

⁹⁴ Queer here refers to the position in normative homosexual sociology and cultural studies, i.e. an anti-conformist position that defends homosexuality as a subversive cultural force, often based on a reading of Foucault.

⁹⁵ Michael Warner. *Trouble with normal. Sex, Politics, and the ethics of queer life.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999)

⁹⁶ Henning Bech. *When Men meet. Homosexuality and Modernity.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997)

⁹⁷ David Halperin. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

⁹⁸ David Halperin. *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002)

⁹⁹ Adam Isaiah Green, "Gay but not queer: Toward a post-queer study of sexuality" (*Theory and Society* 31, 2002: 521-545). Also: Vera Whisman, *Queer by choice. Lesbians, gay men, and the politics of identity.* (London: Routledge, 1996)

¹⁰⁰ Steven Seidman (ed.). *Queer Theory/Sociology.* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996)

¹⁰¹ Leo Bersani. *Homos.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁰² Klaus Laabs. *Lesben. Schwule. Standesamt. Die Debatte um die Homoehe.* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1991)

¹⁰³ Claudia Card. "Against marriage." J. Corvino. *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science and Culture of Homosexuality.* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997: 317-330)

¹⁰⁴ Ilona Bubeck (ed.). *Unser Stück vom Kuchen. Zehn Positionen gegen die Homoehe.* (Berlin: Querverlag, 2000)

¹⁰⁵ Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* (London, Routledge, 1990)

¹⁰⁶ Judith Butler. *Undoing Gender.* (London, Routledge, 2004)

The queer perspective has not been substantially developed in this study – but will be drawn on at various points of the analysis, such as in chapter 6, where the definition of partnership norms implied by the recognition through same-sex marriage is concerned. Queer and feminist arguments that criticise marriage as an institution and advocate innovation in sexual and partnership norms will be repeatedly referred to when similar discursive lines are found in the interview narratives. It should be added that in the analytical perspective employed in this study, a systematic inquiry into gender construction and the impact of gender within homosexual identities has been largely left aside. Also, the relationship between gender on the one hand, and differences between male and female homosexual identities on the other, has remained peripheral to the inquiry. The question of distinguishing between gay milieus and lesbian milieus is also highly relevant in the geographical and cultural context of the cities covered. The focus on the definition of same-sex couples (women or men) as a trigger for our inquiry has had as its consequence the result that a distinction based on this difference had been taken aside for the purpose of a more inclusive analysis. Beyond this study, a more gender based analysis would be beneficial within an extended research agenda on the topic and on the four city milieus in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome.

Various useful publications have appeared within the last years in France on the debate on the Pacs and related questions; see e.g. as the contributions in Daniel Borrillo, Eric Fassin and Marcela Iacub, *Au-delà du PaCS* (1999),¹⁰⁷ and particularly Eric Fassin's extensive work more generally concerning the debates on sexuality and same-sex marriage in France and the US, especially in the collection of texts in *L'inversion de la question homosexuelle* (2005), but also in Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin's *De la question sociale à la question raciale?* (2006).¹⁰⁸ Much more could be said here about studies specific to the political debates in the UK, Germany, Italy and other countries, even though the French case has been looked at partly for its vaster amount of publications on the matter, at least outside the US – and serves in an exemplifying perspective here.

¹⁰⁷ Borrillo, Fassin and Iacub (1999), *Au-delà du PaCS*

¹⁰⁸ Eric Fassin. *L'inversion de la question homosexuelle*. (Paris, Editions Amsterdam, 2005). Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin. *De la question sociale à la question raciale*. (Paris : La découverte, 2006). Also e.g. Eric Fassin, "Usage de la science et science des usages. A propos des familles homoparentales." (*L'Homme*, Vol. 154-155, 2000)

1.2.1.3. Historical and cultural approaches to homosexuality

There are a variety of historical and cultural analyses of homosexuality. I want to distinguish here between historical approaches that look at contemporary lesbian and gay movements, and approaches that include wider cultural and historical frameworks, either beyond modern Western societies or including an analysis of literature and art. Only some examples of studies are listed here, which have been fundamental in the four countries on which the fieldwork concentrates.

On the lesbian and gay movement, for Italy there is G. Barilli Rossi's, Il movimento gay in Italia (1999)¹⁰⁹, for France Frédéric Martel's Le rose et le noir (1996),¹¹⁰ which has caused controversy through his views of gay associations in their reactions to AIDS. Several other works exist in the different national contexts. For a cross-national perspective, see e.g. P.M. Nardi's article 'The globalisation of the gay & lesbian socio-political movement' (1998).¹¹¹ Because of the choice of focus in this project, the study of the recent history of the gay milieus in the four cities Berlin, London, Paris and Rome, will here not be looked at in any extensive way. To exemplify important works in this field, Matt Houlbrook's Queer London (2005) should be referred to.¹¹²

An extensive and highly valuable socio-cultural approach to homosexuality is Didier Eribon's Réflexions sur la question gay (2000),¹¹³ which refers extensively on Foucault's works, and draws an analogy to Hannah Arendt's analysis of social discrimination. Eribon's work will be referred to for his focus on the "insult" as constitutive element of homosexual identity, which we will refer to again below, in the contexts of the sociology of 'deviance'.

A very scholarly and influential historical publication on the US context and New York more specifically is George Chauncey's historical study Gay New York (1994) on homosexual life

¹⁰⁹ G. Barilli Rossi. *Il movimento gay in Italia*. (Milano, Feltrinelli, 1999)

¹¹⁰ Frédéric Martel. *Le rose et le noir : les homosexuels en France depuis 1968*. (Paris, Seuil, 1996)

¹¹¹ P.M. Nardi. "The globalisation of the gay & lesbian socio-political movement. Some observation about Europe with a focus on Italy." (*Sociological Perspectives*, 41, 3, 1998: 567-586). See also for example W.R. Dynes and S. Donaldson. *History of homosexuality in Europe and America*. (New York/London, Garland, 1992) or Bonnie Zimmerman and George Haggerty (eds.). *Encyclopaedia of lesbian and gay histories and culture*. Vol. 1 and 2. (New York/London: Garland, 2000). On lesbian culture in a historical perspective, e.g. Judith M. Bennett, "Lesbian-like" and the social history of lesbianism." (*Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2000: 1-24)

¹¹² Matt Houlbrook. *Queer London. Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005)

¹¹³ Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*. See also Didier Eribon, *Papiers d'identité. Interventions sur la question gay*. (Paris: Fayard, 2000)

and identity construction in the first half of the twentieth century, which will be referred to on several occasions throughout the thesis.¹¹⁴ Florence Tamagne, in *European social history*, provides an extensive study with Histoire de l'Homosexualité, Berlin, Londres, Paris 1919-1939 (2000)¹¹⁵, with a range of policy, court and literature references on the three case-studies of her work, displaying a fascinating range of detail and an impressively thorough extension into terrifying documents from the Nazi period in Germany. Her work will be discussed in further depth in the context of the methodological considerations in chapter 2 concerning research choices in studying European metropolitan homosexuality.

On the British political context, Jeffrey Weeks' Coming out. Homosexual politics in Britain from the nineteenth century to the present (1990) is one of the key texts on twentieth century history of homosexuality.¹¹⁶

1.2.1.4. Psychological approaches

While the study of homosexuality from a psychological perspective forms an important part of the available literature on the topic, these perspectives (comprising very different works from social psychology to psychoanalysis) are considered as largely peripheral to the research undertaken in this project. Indeed, they often focus on conflict situations such as coming out experiences. *Coming out* as a subject of study is not the main focus in this study. Analysing coming out situations would approach the question of homosexual life perspectives from a specific perspective of conflict. The distinctive approach of the coming out narrative will be discussed in chapter 5. However important this conflict situation is in many lesbian and gay life stories, the rationale of the study that is aimed at here requires us to start precisely from a non-conflictual viewpoint, where the social positioning of lesbians and gays is considered as a question of what matters to the individuals in projecting themselves into partnership. Where coming out or similar conflict situations are important, as will become clear in subsequent chapters, the form of the research leaves a flexible space for their expression. Finally, one can observe that the question of coming out is one that has been studied over-proportionally as compared to other aspects of lesbian and gay life.

¹¹⁴ George Chauncey. *Gay New York, Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World*. (New York: Basicbooks, 1994)

¹¹⁵ Florence Tamagne. *Histoire de l'Homosexualité, Berlin, Londres, Paris 1919-1939*. (Paris, Seuil, 2000)

¹¹⁶ Jeffrey Weeks. *Coming out. Homosexual politics in Britain from the nineteenth century to the present*. (London, Quartet books, 1990)

While the focus of this project, and its theoretical approach, differs from most psychological studies on the subject. The extensive collection by Anthony D'Augelli and Charlotte Pattersons (eds.) Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan. Psychological Perspectives (1995)¹¹⁷ could be quoted as a background for this.¹¹⁸ Specifically on coming out, see e.g. E. Coleman, 'Developmental stages of the coming out process' (1982)¹¹⁹ and Ritch C. Savin-William's Mom, Dad, I'm gay. How family negotiate coming out¹²⁰ (2001). For a psychoanalytic perspective, one can mention Udo Rauchfleisch's overview 'Psychoanalyse und Homosexualität. Das Thema Homosexualität in der Psychoanalyse, historischer Abriß' (1993),¹²¹ Gérard Pommier's, 'Les homosexualités' (2000),¹²² and Elaine von Siegel's, Weibliche Homosexualität. Psychoanalytische und therapeutische Praxis (1992).¹²³ The list provided here is no more than a very rough impression of the field within psychological studies.

1.2.1.5. Sociological studies, micro-sociology and qualitative research

Overall, a variety of studies has developed within the micro-sociological perspective on homosexuality, in particular since the 1970s in the US. One can give the following, albeit non-exhaustive, list: K. Jay and A. Young (eds.), The gay report: Lesbian and gay men speak about sexual experiences and lifestyles (1979),¹²⁴ J. Harry's Gay Couples (1984),¹²⁵ C.W. Griffin, M.J. Wirth and A.G. Wirth, Beyond acceptance: parents of lesbian and gays talk about their experiences (1986),¹²⁶ Kath Weston, Families we choose: Lesbians, gays, kinship (1991),¹²⁷

¹¹⁷ Anthony D'Augelli and Charlotte Pattersons (eds.). *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan. Psychological Perspectives*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

¹¹⁸ See also e.g. R. P. Cabaj and T. S. Stein (eds.). *Textbook of homosexuality and mental health*. (Washington: American Psychiatric Press, 1996) - a vast collection of contributions mostly from a social psychology perspective - or Richard Isay. *Schul sein. Die psychologische Entwicklung des Homosexuellen*. (München: Piper, 1990)

¹¹⁹ E. Coleman. "Developmental stages of the coming out process." (*Journal of Homosexuality*, 7, 2-3, 1982)

¹²⁰ R.C. Savin-William. *Mom, Dad, I'm gay. How family negotiate coming out*. (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2001)

¹²¹ Udo Rauchfleisch. "Psychoanalyse und Homosexualität. Das Thema Homosexualität in der Psychoanalyse, historischer Abriß." Helmut Puff (ed.). *Lust, Angst und Provokation. Homosexualität in der Gesellschaft*. (Göttingen/Zürich: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993: 159-182)

¹²² Gérard Pommier. "Les homosexualités." (*La Clinique lacanienne* 4, 2000)

¹²³ Elaine von Siegel. *Weibliche Homosexualität. Psychoanalytische und therapeutische Praxis*. (München/Basel: Reinhardt, 1992)

¹²⁴ Karla Jay and Allan Young (eds.). *The gay report: Lesbian and gay men speak about sexual experiences and lifestyles*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979)

¹²⁵ Joseph Harry. *Gay Couples*. (New York: Praeger, 1984)

¹²⁶ Carolyn W. Griffin, Marian J. Wirth and A.G. Wirth. *Beyond acceptance: parents of lesbian and gays talk about their experiences*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1986)

¹²⁷ Kath Weston. *Families we choose: Lesbians, gays, kinship*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)

Gilbert Herdt (ed.), Gay Culture in America: Essays From the Field (1992),¹²⁸ M. Huston and P. Schwartz, 'The relationship of lesbian women and gay men' (1995),¹²⁹ A. Coxon, Between the sheets. Sexual diaries and gay men's sex in the era of Aids (1996),¹³⁰ G. Herdt, Same sex in different cultures. Exploring gay and lesbian lives (1997),¹³¹ and L.A. Peplau and L.R. Spalding, 'The close relationships of lesbians, gays and bisexuals' (2000).¹³² New studies here include Kathleen Hull's research on same-sex weddings,¹³³ and Gretchen A. Stiers, From this day forward: Commitment, marriage, and the family in lesbian and gay relationships (2000)¹³⁴, which combines the question of anti-marriage positions and their (in-) coherence vis-à-vis the same-sex marriage movement with a fieldwork inquiry into integration and subversion of traditional models of the family in gay and lesbian marriage projects.

Ellen Lewin's work in social anthropology is also very relevant for this field: Lesbian Mothers (1993)¹³⁵, Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America¹³⁶, Recognizing Ourselves: Ceremonies of Lesbian and Gay Commitment (1999).¹³⁷ Judith Stacey's micro-sociological perspective is extremely useful and her article 'Cruising to Familyland'¹³⁸ will be referred to in chapter 4. Savin-Williams' very recent social psychology/sociological study on teenagers and sexual identities in the US, The New Gay Teenager (2005),¹³⁹ is highly relevant for the study of generational change and will be referred to in some depth in chapter six.

In Europe, some recent studies include micro-sociological perspectives on homosexual lifestyles and same-sex couples. Gérard Ignasse's edition Les pacsé-e-s (2002)¹⁴⁰ presents an

¹²⁸ Gilbert Herdt (ed.). *Gay Culture in America: Essays From the Field*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992)

¹²⁹ M. Huston and P. Schwartz. "The relationship of lesbian women and gay men." J.T. Wood and S. Duck (eds.). *Under-studied relationships. Off the beaten track*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995)

¹³⁰ Anthony Coxon. *Between the sheets. Sexual diaries and gay men's sex in the era of Aids*. (London: Cassel, 1996)

¹³¹ Gilbert Herdt. *Same sex in different cultures. Exploring gay and lesbian lives*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997)

¹³² L.A. Peplau and L.R. Spalding. "The close relationships of lesbians, gays and bisexuals" C. Hendrick and S.S. Hendrick (eds.). *Close relationships*. (London: Sage, 2000: 111-124)

¹³³ Kathleen Hull. *Wedding Rites/Marriage Rights. The cultural politics of same-sex marriage*. (PhD dissertation in Sociology. Northwestern University, 2001)

¹³⁴ Gretchen A. Stiers. *From this day forward: Commitment, marriage, and the family in lesbian and gay relationships*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000)

¹³⁵ Ellen Lewin *Lesbian Mothers. Accounts of Gender in American Culture*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993)

¹³⁶ Ellen Lewin (ed.). *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996)

¹³⁷ Ellen Lewin. *Recognizing Ourselves: Ceremonies of Lesbian and Gay Commitment*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)

¹³⁸ Judith Stacey, "Cruising to Familyland: Gay Hypergamy and Rainbow Kinship." (*Current Sociology*, March 2004, Vol 52,2: 181-197)

¹³⁹ Ritch C. Savin-Williams. *The New Gay Teenager*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005)

¹⁴⁰ Ignasse (2002), *Les pacsé-e-s*.

extensive analysis of written questionnaires with open questions to couples (including the heterosexual, homosexual and so-called 'solidarity' couples who have signed a *Pacs* in France). It becomes particularly clear that while homosexual couples often consider their registration as a highly symbolic act, often as social recognition of the relationships that they have had for ten or twenty years, heterosexual couples often showed a pragmatic attitude towards the rights that the *Pacs* accords to their partnership, or sometimes explained their choice of the *Pacs* as a result of their hostility to the symbolic connotations they see in marriage.¹⁴¹ Wilfried Rault's study on *Pacs* registrations celebrations (PhD, 2005)¹⁴² focuses on the institutional and ritualistic aspect of same-sex partnership registrations in during the first years of the existence of the *Pacs*. The collection of articles in Anne Weyembergh and Sinziana Carstocea's *The gays' and lesbians' rights in an enlarged European Union* (2006)¹⁴³ includes both legal and sociological studies from a range Western and Eastern European countries, pointing to the links between legal and social change, such as in Kees Waldijk's contribution, or social constraints in everyday life, such as in Roman Kuhar's contribution based on the study of Slovenian lesbian and gay everyday life. *Homosexualité au temps du sida*, edited by Christophe Broqua, France Lert and Yves Souteyrand (2003)¹⁴⁴ brings together various very useful studies on homosexuality, gay and lesbian sexual activity and HIV risk, and homosexual identity as related to the AIDS crisis and safer sex in France. Arnaud Lerch's research into multi-partnership (e.g. "Les éthiques conjugales gaies à l'épreuve du multipartenariat"¹⁴⁵) is highly relevant and relates to various discourses on partnership diversity in chapter 4. Marie-Ange Schiltz¹⁴⁶ on France and Michael Bochow on Germany¹⁴⁷ have conducted various quantitative analyses of gay partnerships and sexuality, which review generational differences, and the influence of AIDS on sex practices and on the desire for stable partnerships. While these analyses are highly relevant to the topic and at the same time also constitute an important background, the qualitative discursive findings from the interview material will stand at the forefront of this study.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, see in particular pp. 78-83.

¹⁴² Wilfried Rault, *Les usages symboliques du Pacs*, PhD, Paris VI/EHESS, 2005.

¹⁴³ Weyembergh and Carstocea, eds. (2006). *Gays' and lesbians' rights*.

¹⁴⁴ Broqua, Christophe, France Lert and Yves Souteyrand (eds.). *Homosexualités au temps du sida: tensions sociales et identitaires*. (Paris: Agence nationale de recherche sur le sida, Editions EDK, October 2003)

¹⁴⁵ Arnaud Lerch. "Les éthiques conjugales gaies à l'épreuve du multipartenariat." Rose Marie Lagrave, Agathe Gestin, Eleonore Lepinard and Geneviève Pruvost (eds.). *Dissemblances. Jeux et enjeux du genre*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002)

¹⁴⁶ E.g. Marie-Ange Schiltz. "Young homosexual Itinaries in the Context of HIV: Establishing Lifestyles." (*Population: An English Selection*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1998:417-445)

¹⁴⁷ E.g. Michael Bochow. *Schwule Männer, AIDS und Safer Sex – neue Entwicklungen*. (Berlin: Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, 2001)

In Italy, the family sociologist Marzio Barbagli at the University of Bologna figures under the most prominent researchers on the topic. *Omosessuali moderni* (2001)¹⁴⁸ by Marzio Barbagli and Asher Colombo offers a broad study of the situation of lesbians and gays in contemporary Italy, which explicitly bases itself on both a qualitative and a quantitative sample of empirical research. The scope of the study, which was conducted over six years, is impressive, both considering the size of the sample (over 3,500 for the questionnaire based analysis, 146 in-depth interviews) and due to the aspects of homosexuality analyzed: from *coming out*, identity formation, social acceptance in various areas of social life, sexual practice, the role of associations and the lesbian and gay scene in Italy, the city/countryside divide, family relationships, partnerships and children of lesbian and gay couples, to - finally - the cultural and historical context in an Italian, European and global perspective. Very useful results point to the role of different social contexts, such as parents, friends and the working environment in the social positioning of homosexuality in Italy. Another interesting result shown by the survey analysis concerns the social composition of homosexual locations,¹⁴⁹ and the dominant role of urban centres, including in particular Rome, Milan and Bologna.¹⁵⁰ It, however, also demonstrates the difficulty of aiming at representative quantitative analysis of homosexuality, due to the problem of how to define the group under study and the question of a 'hidden' homosexual population.¹⁵¹

A very useful and wide-ranging study based on a specifically qualitative approach to homosexual lives in the UK, is the work by Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy, and Catherine Donovan, *Same Sex Intimacies* (2001).¹⁵² A more detailed review of this work is given below, which will serve as a clearer indication as to how this doctoral study will contribute to the field. Ken Plummer's work is equally relevant and will be referred to in chapter 5.¹⁵³ Regarding Germany, Michael Bochow has undertaken various research projects relating to gay men,

¹⁴⁸ Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid: 186-193.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid: 193-196.

¹⁵¹ The channels of contact will always predetermine a certain outcome, such as for the role of bisexuality in the study of homosexuality (see e.g. *ibid.*, table 1.6. p. 55) or for the geographical differences of levels of affirmation when considering for example the statistical significance of defining that proportionally more than four times more gays are 'born' in Bologna compared to Palermo (table 5.6., p. 194). While useful if treated with care, the data for the analysis in fact comes from the data set of Arcigay that covers most, but by far not all homosexual locations in Italy. See Appendix, pp. 284f. (This can help to explain some astonishing results such as in the case of Florence for example, where indeed most Florentine homosexual associations and locations have pulled out of Arcigay due to political differences.)

¹⁵² Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001), *Same Sex Intimacies*.

¹⁵³ Ken Plummer (ed.). *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience*. (London: Routledge, 1992). Also: Ken Plummer. *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, change and social worlds*. (London: Routledge, 1995)

comprising studies of HIV risk, gays in the countryside, ethnic minorities and Islam, and old age.¹⁵⁴

Overall, in reviewing the literature available on same-sex couples and homosexuality, in the approaches that have been distinguished, it becomes clear that while there is a whole range of quality literature within the subject matter, the research question that is posed here, namely to address recognition, and foremost legal recognition, from an interview based sociological perspective has not been extensively addressed. That is to say, micro-sociological approaches have only rarely addressed legal forms of recognition and specifically the meaning they have for lesbians and gays. As to the cross-national approach taken here, the European scope of social and legal change has been studied mainly from a jurisprudential or historical perspective – in these latter two fields however with an impressive recent increase in quality research. Furthermore, the qualitative sociological studies that have focused on partnership recognition have most often focused on the act which couples go through, i.e. the appropriation and negotiation of the ritual itself. In doing so, they have focused on the couple rather than on the individual lesbian or gay person and the impact which legal changes have on her or him. My thesis will thus build on the existing research by addressing the question of the legal and social changes in relation to same-sex marriages from the perspective of individuals' discourses.

1.2.1.6. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan: Same-sex intimacies

In the context of the UK, *Same Sex Intimacies* by Jeffrey Weeks et al.¹⁵⁵ is reviewed here as an example of the form which the research project can take, despite its different focus and the different geographical scope.

Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan's work presents a wide research project under the heading "families of choice" through series of studies done in 1995, 1996 and 1999. It is based on in-depth interviews with 48 women and 48 men. The subjects the study covers are: "personal life and identity; friendships; household; partners; children; caring; HIV and AIDS; legalities, partnerships and marriage; families; trust and obligations; intimacy; love; sex and sexuality;

¹⁵⁴ Michael Bochow. *Schwules Leben in der Provinz. Zum Beispiel Niedersachsen*. (Berlin: Sigma, 1998). Michael Bochow and Rainer Marbach (eds.). *Islam und Homosexualität*. (Hamburg: Männerschwarmskript, 2003). Michael Bochow. *Ich bin doch schwul und will das immer bleiben. Schwule Männer im dritten Lebensalter*. (Hamburg: Waldschlösschen, 2005)

¹⁵⁵ Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), *Same-sex intimacies*.

stigma; general.”¹⁵⁶ Interviews were mainly held individually but also in couples or groups, with three to seven hours of conversation for each. The channels of contact selected by the researchers are those of adverts in the lesbian and gay press and requests through various associations, where interested individuals, couples or groups actively established contact with the researchers. A special effort was made to include “rural non-heterosexuals”¹⁵⁷ and certain minority groups (according to ethnicity, age, and disability) that were seen as underrepresented in an initial sample. As the interviewees established contact with the researchers, it seems rather unsurprising that, as the authors say, “most of the interviewees were willing or eager to tell their stories”.¹⁵⁸ The resulting interview data is regarded as “narratives of the intimate that have a key role to play in the organisation of everyday life.”¹⁵⁹ “The intimate” here refers to close social networks as well as sexuality; “intimate”, in contrast to “private” or “personal”, does not carry the potential ideological baggage as to what should be intimate, and leaves open the question as to whether social networks are constructed around sexual relationships, family relationships, or friendships. In the context of controversies over relationships and forms of partnership, the key question of the analysis is: “What are the meanings of ‘intimacy’, ‘relationships’ and ‘family’ today?”, also formulated as “How shall we live?”¹⁶⁰

The basic assumption on which Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan’s research is based is the observation of a twofold change, one within society at large, and the second within lesbian and gay “partnership ethics”. The first is referred to as the logic of choice replacing traditional forms of the understanding of family and marriage. For this, reference to individualisation processes as analysed by Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim are quoted. Overall, this change is said to have produced “an increasing flexibility and ‘moral fluency’ (Mulgan 1997¹⁶¹) in intimate life, which stretches across the heterosexual-homosexual divide.”¹⁶² The same-sex life narratives that are presented are thereby seen as an element that breaks with traditional forms of family and partnership: “they signal the decline of the old, and the uncertain attitudes still prevalent about the new.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Ibid: 203

¹⁵⁷ Ibid: 201

¹⁵⁸ Ibid: 205

¹⁵⁹ Ibid: 206

¹⁶⁰ Ibid: 3

¹⁶¹ G. Mulgan. *Connexity: How to live in a connected world*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), cited *ibid*.

¹⁶² Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), *Same-sex intimacies*: 20

¹⁶³ Ibid: 2

In accordance with this development in society overall, Weeks et al. observe within British gay and lesbian families the importance of choice and self-construction in reflexively defined partnership and family situations. This dynamic of self-construction was made possible by the wider liberalisation, political liberalisation, political campaigns, visibility, and social networks leading to greater self-confidence. Choice and self-construction are however not only seen as being triggered by an increased inclusion into a more pluralistic society, but also by the continuing exclusion from mainstream norms:

[D]iscovering that I was homosexual meant having to invent myself because there was nothing there ... there weren't any role models. It may well be different for gay men coming out now. ... But there's still that element of self-invention. (Greg)¹⁶⁴

In this context, it is the "emergence of the new relationship ethic in the non-heterosexual world" that is examined, in the sense of "growing maturity and complexity of the non-heterosexual world itself as a result of a long and vibrant history".¹⁶⁵ The construction element is particularly important in these "families of choice", as compared to heterosexual families, as they are still most often built in accordance with a heterosexual norm that constitutes the mainstream social assumption about how to organise one's private life: "despite the dramatic liberalisation of attitudes in recent years, same sex relationships continue to be defined by, and against, the heterosexual assumption."¹⁶⁶ "The resulting ways of life are seen as the achievement of self activity, of conscious human agency."¹⁶⁷ These observations are drawn from a widely expressed feeling of difference, a rejection of traditional family models and a reinvention of family independent of the biological family (family of choice). The participants in the study refer to "family" and relationships in both the "old" and self-constructed way, with a normative underpinning that views the new model as the better one:

[Taken from different interview extracts:]

David: ... the whole basis of lesbian and gay relationships are [sic] different from heterosexual relationships ... it is blatantly different ...

Rachel: I do not, as a black lesbian, want to be seen as the same as a heterosexual couple. I do not want to marry my lover, nor do I want to do anything that even remotely looks like that.

Mark: My family? At the moment my family are being a bloody nuisance. My bloody brother, my bloody grandparents!

Greg: [laughs] But that's just families, isn't it? That's what families are.

Juliet: The way I think about those people [my friends] is the way that, you know, generally, people would regard family.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Ibid: 43

¹⁶⁵ Ibid: vii

¹⁶⁶ Ibid: vi

¹⁶⁷ Ibid: 47

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.: 46, 47, 48, 60 respectively

These extracts hence illustrate both the (ironic) rejection of conventional family models and the re-appropriation of the concept for close social environments such as circles of friends. The meaning of the legal recognition of partnerships is raised under the heading "partnership rites". Here, the views expressed on these rites (in analogy or opposition to marriage) ranged from hostility to personal experiences in religious partnership ceremonies, from pragmatic views to support for symbolic recognition and political visibility.¹⁶⁹

Overall, the main elements of the intimate life of those under study are the mutual construction of partnership and family against pre-given heterosexual norms, diversity and plurality, the construction of commitment and responsibility in families of choice and the less central role of the couple.¹⁷⁰ The study shows how a fruitful and qualitative sociological approach to same-sex lives can be set up to express complex constructions of life plans in the context of wider social norms, but also often in opposition to those norms. There are of course extensive differences between this and the approach that I adopt, since I will focus more extensively on the meaning of changes in social and legal recognition and on geographical areas with a high degree of acceptance. Furthermore, different channels of contact will be chosen given that the placing of ads might (although not necessarily) create a bias towards affirmative, self-confident organisations of private life, i.e. towards people who feel that they have a story to tell. Finally, a viewpoint that addresses the question across the national borders in a European social context is not included in Weeks' study.

The impact of choice - twofold in Weeks' analysis as mentioned above - is one which this study in turn addresses in chapter 6. If choice in the construction of individualized partnership and family models is on the one hand favoured by a larger sociological trend (Becks/Giddens), and on the other hand the result of exclusion and marginal status ("having to invent myself"), two main questions arise. First, to what extent is the sociological observation of a norm that favours choice one that places the individual at the centre of that choice? In other words, is a social norm that imposes certain choice-associated life plans not (just) a new constraint on the individual and her identity formation? Here, the answer can be 'yes' and 'no'. While a choice based norm can be experienced as just a new constraint, we could argue that the norm is more in accordance with our normative beliefs in a liberal society, based on principles of equality, reciprocity and individual freedoms. In these terms, it would not be "just" a new norm, but a norm that is more "just". By linking the sociological project to the theoretical debates on

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., mainly 125ff

recognition and liberal political philosophy, the argument supports the “recognition” of life plans that have been actively chosen and that are based on reciprocity and on egalitarian principles (see chapter 5 and 6).

Second, the question arises as to the extent to which the argument that identity construction for lesbian and gays continues to be based on exclusion (or on the “insult” as for Eribon).¹⁷¹ Has the changing status of homosexual lifestyles and life perspectives in European societies altered this understanding of gay and lesbian identities? Or is the experience of being marginal still an important element of it? Here, the fieldwork points in two directions, and helps to distinguish between a general trend towards recognition and careful negotiations of public identities in specific social settings. (See analysis in chapter 6).

From these two perspectives, as related to Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan’s important study, this research therefore picks up on main theses in the established literature in the sociology of homosexuality. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan’s study also shows the impact of larger referential frames on the analysis of homosexuals’ everyday life and homosexual identities, of which I shall now give an exemplifying overview.

1.2.2. Relevant literature: the wider frames

Given the empirical focus of the project, it is not possible to give a thorough overview of all larger frames of reference. Therefore, the main subject areas will be noted and only works most relevant to the question examined here will be referred to at length. As will be seen in chapter 5 and 6, the theoretical background to the project will be elaborated with reference to a conceptual understanding of identity and recognition using a reformulation of Erving Goffman’s concept of identity management, a critical reading of Axel Honneth’s Struggle for recognition¹⁷² and elements of Jean-Claude Kaufmann’s sociology of the individual.¹⁷³

Broadly identified, the larger frames are 1) sociology of the family, 2) sociology of love and of the couple, 3) the study of deviance and fieldwork approaches in this sociological tradition, 4)

¹⁷⁰ On the role of the couple see *ibid*: 198

¹⁷¹ Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*: 29-32

¹⁷² Axel Honneth. *Kampf um Anerkennung*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994)

¹⁷³ Jean-Claude Kaufmann. *L'invention de soi*. (Paris: Hachette, 2004). Jean-Claude Kaufmann. *Ego. Pour une sociologie de l'individu*. (Paris: Nathan, 2001)

liberal political theory, 5) social and political theory with a focus on individual self-construction, individualisation, recognition, and identity.

1.2.2.1. *Sociology of the family*

For the sociology of the family, Jacques Comaille and François de Singly's edition La question familiale en Europe (1997)¹⁷⁴ should be mentioned, with its various contributions on the family in Europe and elsewhere. Colin Crouch's Social Change in Western Europe¹⁷⁵ (1999) includes a large section on the family in relation to the liberalisation of European societies.¹⁷⁶ In France, one should note the various publications by François de Singly; most important for the research undertaken here is Le Soi, le couple et la famille (1996)¹⁷⁷ on the construction of the modern self in love and partnership. Furthermore, various approaches taken by Jean-Claude Kaufmann in sociology are very useful, such as the study on "lonely women" La femme seule et le prince charmant (1999),¹⁷⁸ based on in depth interviews discussing partnership from the single woman's perspective and the changing social norms in the perception of "non-couple" life or life as a single person in society as a whole.

As a key contribution to our understanding of the construction of the self in marriage, Berger and Kellner's article "Marriage and the social construction of reality" (1964)¹⁷⁹ provides an important background for this study. For an analysis of the family from a point of view of debates on individualisation and modernity in sociology, we can mention Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim's works, e.g. "Auf dem Weg in die postfamiliale Familie – von der Notgemeinschaft zur Wahlverwandtschaft" (1994).¹⁸⁰

In this non-exhaustive list it is noteworthy that homosexuality and same-sex couples are usually not discussed in major works on the family. At the same time, one can speak of an increasing number of studies on lesbian and gay parents within the last years in Europe.

¹⁷⁴ Jacques Comaille and François de Singly (eds.). *La question familiale en Europe*. (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1997)

¹⁷⁵ Colin Crouch. *Social Change in Western Europe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

¹⁷⁶ Ibid: 199-254

¹⁷⁷ François de Singly. *Le Soi, le couple et la famille*. (Paris: Nathan, 1996)

¹⁷⁸ Jean-Claude Kaufmann. *La femme seule et le prince charmant*. (Paris: Nathan, 1999). Also Jean-Claude Kaufmann. *La trame conjugale*. (Paris: Nathan, 1992); Jean-Claude Kaufmann. *Sociologie du couple*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993)

¹⁷⁹ Peter Berger and M. Kellner. "Marriage and the social construction of reality." (*Diogenes*, Vol. 46, 1964)

¹⁸⁰ Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim "Auf dem Weg in die postfamiliale Familie – von der Notgemeinschaft zur Wahlverwandtschaft." Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (eds.). *Riskante Freiheiten*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994). See also Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. *Das ganz normale Chaos der Liebe*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990)

Caroline Mécary analyses the gap between debates on same-sex couples and the absence of homosexual families in defining 'family' (in the French context) in her article "Paris 2001: naissance discrète de l'homofamille"¹⁸¹ (2003). An example of an analysis of the family that more firmly includes questions of the homosexual family is Elisabeth Roudinesco's La famille en désordre (2002).¹⁸²

1.2.2.2. *Sociology of love*

Despite various overlaps with works on the family, one can distinguish works that theorise love on a more emotional level. Here, one should state Niklas Luhmann's highly theoretical approach in Liebe als Passion (1982)¹⁸³ or, in a very different (US interview-based) perspective, Robert Bellah et al.'s Habits of the Heart (1985)¹⁸⁴ or more recently Ann Swidler's Talk of Love¹⁸⁵ (2001), where narratives on love are embedded in American popular culture. In yet another light, Anthony Giddens' The transformation of intimacy¹⁸⁶ (1992), is equally relevant in its analysis specific to family and sexuality, and will be repeatedly referred to.

1.2.2.3. 'Deviance'

'Deviance' as a field of academic inquiry has been crucial in the analysis of social norms and self-identification at their margins. One benchmark study for deviance as a social phenomenon is Howard Becker's Outsiders (1963).¹⁸⁷ In Becker's labelling theory, which has gained importance throughout the subsequent decades, it is the social classification of deviant behaviour that forms the basis for what is to be considered to lie outside the norm. The actions and identities of 'deviants', from this social constructivist perspective, are explored in relation to the labels that they have been given. A central work in this context is also Erving Goffman's Stigma (1970)¹⁸⁸. His earlier work Behaviour in Public Places (1963)¹⁸⁹ will also be of relevance. In the deviance perspective, more specifically on sexuality, Goode and

¹⁸¹ Caroline Mécary. "Paris 2001: naissance discrète de l'homofamille." Marcela Iacub and Patrice Maniglier (eds.), *Familles en scènes*. (Paris: Editions autrement, 2003)

¹⁸² Elisabeth Roudinesco. *La famille en désordre*. (Paris, Fayard, 2002).

¹⁸³ Niklas Luhmann. *Liebe als Passion. Zur Codierung von Intimität*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982)

¹⁸⁴ Robert N. Bellah, R. Madsen, W.M. Sullivan, A. Swidler, and S.M. Tipton. *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1985)

¹⁸⁵ Ann Swidler. *Talk of love: How culture matters*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001)

¹⁸⁶ Anthony Giddens. *The transformation of intimacy*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992)

¹⁸⁷ Howard Becker. *Outsiders: studies in the sociology of deviance*. (New York: Free Press, 1963)

¹⁸⁸ Erving Goffman. *Stigma. Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970)

Troiden's Sexual deviance and sexual deviants¹⁹⁰ (1974) can also be noted. Didier Eribon, whom we have referred to above, interprets gay identity from this perspective in seeing the "insult" as a foundational experience of being gay.¹⁹¹ Becker's and Goffman's specific theories of 'deviance', and the 'deviance' perspective more generally, while not dealt with in greater depth, are important as a background on the individual's perspective on social norms, and his or her possible exclusion from these. They supply crucial insights into the specific question under study here, albeit from a slightly different perspective that focuses on social exclusion. At several points in the thesis, we will refer to Didier Eribon's interpretation of such an approach where he draws on Goffman in his analysis. Both Goffman's and Becker's works, however, in addition to addressing marginal groups (such as drug users, mental patients, transsexuals), also address processes of identity construction that are valid in any social setting within mainstream society. In a similar way, as will be seen, the construction of homosexual identities need not necessarily be related to a marginal status of gay and lesbian lifestyles in society, and the specific conditions and normative contexts of such processes can be analysed from a perspective that is independent of the very question as to whether a study would be classified as relating to deviance or stigma. It is in this context that Goffman's approach to how identity is managed in public places – in general, rather than by a deviant member of society – will be central to the analysis of identity in chapter 5.

1.2.2.4. *Individual and Self*

In terms of Social Theory, the literature on the individual and self which serves as a frame of reference for approaching the question of self-construction in a social and legal context is extremely wide-ranging. In debates on modernity, the position of the individual in relation to traditions and social norms forms the basis for various inquiries into the construction of the self as a social product or as an active self-constructing agent, or, most plausibly, both at the same time. Giddens and Beck, as mentioned above, are important in defining this field.¹⁹² Charles Taylor's Sources of the Self (1989)¹⁹³ is a key work in the analysis of the social conditions for self-construction. In the tenth chapter of A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and

¹⁸⁹ Erving Goffman. *Behaviour in Public Places*. (New York: Free Press 1963)

¹⁹⁰ Eric Goode and Richard R. Troiden. *Sexual deviance and sexual deviants*. (New York: Morrow, 1974)

¹⁹¹ Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*. Particularly: "Le choc de l'injure" (pp. 29-32)

¹⁹² See e.g. Anthony Giddens. *Modernity and Self-Identity*. (Cambridge: Polity, 1991) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1994), *Riskante Freiheiten*.

¹⁹³ Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989)

Discipline (1994),¹⁹⁴ Peter Wagner provides a discussion of identity-building in the light of changed patterns of social validation in modernity and contemporary (post-modern) Western societies. These are characterised by a disembedding and fluidity that is highly relevant for the research undertaken here. Jean-Claude Kaufmann's Ego¹⁹⁵ (2001) reviews the ambiguities in individualisation debates and defines the individual as a process whilst retaining the concepts of autonomy and self-construction inherent to the modern understanding of the individual. On a very different line, Axel Honneth's Kampf um Anerkennung (1992) depicts the individual as reflexively self-constructed in three spheres of recognition, and will be referred to most extensively in chapter 5.

The debates on the self and the social construction of identity could be explored in this project in various ways, including the affirmation of homosexual lifestyles as seen as in the light of the disentangling traditional structures that are being replaced by more choice-defined social relations, as we have outlined in discussion of the perspective of Giddens, Becks, Becks-Gernsheim, and Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan. As the analysis will show, such a view needs to be complemented through an understanding of the new normative constraints which a changing social reality represents. Here, the question of the reflexivity of self-construction in intimate relations within a normative and social reality context lies at the core of our understanding of forms of recognition and projections into partnership at the level of the individual.

1.2.2.5. Political philosophy

The normative understandings of the self in the context of values of autonomy and equality are closely linked to the understanding of individualisation and the sociological analysis of self. Liberal theory reflecting the relation between these values and the understanding of the individual in the context of the state and the law shows us how normative understandings of the role of the state in partnership are understood in liberal societies. Here again, a short-list of publications would include John Rawls' political philosophy as the underlying basis for most of the recent debates in the field (Theory of Justice, 1971,¹⁹⁶ Political Liberalism, 1993¹⁹⁷). Jeremy Waldron's Liberal Rights (1993)¹⁹⁸ contains an analysis of liberal views of the state

¹⁹⁴ Peter Wagner. *A Sociology of Modernity. Liberty and Discipline*. (London: Routledge, 1994)

¹⁹⁵ Kaufmann (2001), *Ego*

¹⁹⁶ John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971)

¹⁹⁷ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)

¹⁹⁸ Jeremy Waldron, *Liberal Rights*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

between autonomy-based values and neutrality which is extremely useful in clarifying the normative context of legislation regarding same-sex couples. For this relationship between liberal theory and partnership laws for same-sex couples, I will also draw on my own analysis of the *Pacs* in the light of liberal neutrality.¹⁹⁹

The debate between communitarian positions and liberalism should be mentioned here, and will be briefly referred back to in chapter 5. Communitarian understandings of group identities that view the recognition of cultural identities as a necessary political goal tend to touch only peripherally upon homosexual identities. Liberalism sees the relationship between the individual, or citizen, and the state as a direct one: cultural identities are a matter of choice on the part of the individual – a choice which individuals are capable of making as autonomous agents. Under a communitarian perspective, the individual acquires a meaningful life through being constituted within the cultural group to which she belongs, while liberals would see the individual as capable of distancing herself from a given cultural identity if she chooses to do so. Recognition, a central term in this project, does not have much place in a liberal perspective if anything other than recognition of citizens' rights is concerned. However, as will be seen, in Honneth's perspective, along with Nancy Fraser's work that draws on it for a normative understanding of a liberal redefinition of the recognition debate, provides a useful starting point here, which will be spelled out in chapter 5.²⁰⁰

The thesis addresses the question of how social change is appropriated at the level of the individual lesbian and gay person. What do lesbians and gays say about it? As will be seen, the concepts of recognition and identity will thereby gain a specific, individual-centred meaning. The interview material from Paris, London, Berlin and Rome will show how changes are taken up, "appropriated", in gays' and lesbians' discourses, first by noting how lived experiences and legal options are confronted, and second, the effect of the social environment on the construction of individual identities.

In the following chapter, the approach, method and research design of the thesis will be laid out, which will further clarify the underlying conceptual understanding of identity and recognition, the question of representation and the role of narratives within this study.

¹⁹⁹ Frédéric Jörgens, 'Pacs, Marriage, and Neutrality of the State', B.A. thesis in Modern European Studies, supervised by Véronique Munoz-Dardé, University College London, 2001. Main thesis published in *Modern European Research*, No 7, 2002.

²⁰⁰ Various articles, e.g. Nancy Fraser. "Recognition without Ethics". Scott Lash and Mike Featherstone (eds.), *Recognition & Difference*. (London: Sage, 2002: 21-42)

Chapter II

Approach, Method, Research Design

This chapter will review different aspects of the approach and methodology and explain the different stages in the formulation of the research design for the empirical study. We will thus look both at the underlying assumptions that contextualize the fieldwork and at its practicalities such as sampling, recruiting and interviewing, as well as problems and observations arising from it. Beyond strictly methodological concerns, we will first address questions concerning the representation of homosexuality through examples in the social science literature on the subject and link these observations to the research choices in the empirical project.

The methodological reflections in this chapter will not altogether aim at subscribing to one school of social science research methodology. Instead, the aim is to make choices as explicit as possible and expose the theoretical understanding that underlies them. Having said this, some main ideas from *Grounded Theory* form a background to the research design. In accordance with Grounded Theory, the theoretical approach, method and research design have been developed in interaction with the fieldwork itself.¹ This means that experiences gained in the fieldwork have fed into the theoretical understanding of the approach. One of the key elements of Grounded Theory, which is the one adopted here, is to make the theoretical framework and data interact throughout the research process.² It is understood that the methodological questioning of the approach at the various stages of the empirical project is neither to be limited to the initial research design nor to an ideal final methodology. Rather, the insights gained from the research and the critical reviewing of the ongoing work forms a reflective basis for readjusting and gradually improving the project. The use of semi-directed and open in-depth interviews supports this strategy. Ultimately, it should also be added that diversions from the initial research design have, however, not been substantial in any respect.

¹ Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1967); Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (eds.). *Grounded Theory in Practice*. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997); Anselm Strauss. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987)

² See e.g. Bruno Hildenbrand. "Anselm Strauss." Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff and Ines Steinke (eds.). *Qualitative Forschung*. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2000: 32-42)

This structure of this chapter concords with the logical and initial chronological development of the study. For that purpose, the first section will analyse the problems of defining and representing homosexuality or lesbians and gays. Through the use of examples in the literature, it addresses the conceptual question of homosexuality as a subject within sociological research. This will help to establish the degree of relevance which the chosen field could have, e.g. in terms of what aspects of "homosexuality" it represents. The questions raised here are: Who is a social science researcher speaking about when looking at homosexuality? Whom should s/he be speaking about? Is homosexuality a meaningful category at all for social science research? Reviewing the definition will then lead to the choice of a field of research, narrowed down to the lesbian and gay metropolitan bar milieu, which constitutes the more precisely defined focus of this study.

On the basis of this reasoning, the research design and further research steps will subsequently be defined. The method and the approach taken in the research will be critically described, and the questions of access, sampling and interviewing will be addressed. After this, the reasoning behind conducting a qualitative study on the basis of in-depth interviews with respondents recruited from lesbian and gay bars in Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome will be explained. Finally, in the last part of this chapter, reflections on the methodology and the research design are based on the fieldwork experience itself, where the interviews and the role of the interviewer within them are critically reviewed.

Explaining the choices made for this research is not equivalent to suggesting this would be the best way to proceed. Other choices concerning the field and the research design might also be interesting, wider in scope, or more specific. We had already mentioned that some specific research angles were not pursued in the main research design, such as an approach based on gender or a quantitative approach to partnership practices. The intention of this chapter is to describe the choices in this project as clearly and precisely as possible, in order to expose the inevitable bias and limitations that any such choice implies. I will explain how the specific perspective of this empirical study is valid and pertinent to the theoretical questions addressed in the thesis.

2.1. Defining homosexuality

The question of how to define homosexuality has been a central concern in deciding on an approach. The concept of homosexuality used in sociological analysis often varies between those based on a social *practice* (e.g. sexual practice, frequenting sub-cultures or locations, self-definition etc.) and *essentialist* views, where these latter ones can be linked to the idea of sexual orientation.³ Interestingly, the increasing academic interest in the question of the homosexual *couple*, now widely present in legal, philosophical and in a growing number of sociological studies on homosexuality is often implicitly accompanied by a conception of homosexuality based on *sexual orientation* (i.e. a person “*is*” lesbian or gay, instead of “*does this or that*”), which legally and politically is in turn closely linked to the notion of homosexual rights.⁴

A sociological study that aims at analysing the people concerned by the social change of the recognition of same-sex couples (lesbians and gays) always faces the dilemma of being accused either of not adequately representing homosexuals (when the study is based on a *practice*), or of establishing a field around a more or less convincingly pre-tailored concept (when it tries to represent *the homosexuals*). Who belongs to this set of people? As mentioned above, a clear line cannot be drawn. Any empirical study of homosexuality necessarily will have to restrict itself to a specific field.

2.1.1. A working definition of the field: The metropolitan gay and lesbian bar scene

The main route that was taken – and there is probably no uncontroversial access for an empirical study on this topic – was to choose a clearly restricted field which is linked to a social practice, namely the field of gay and lesbian bars and cafés, in which respondents have been directly approached. This may sound like an odd approach to a question that starts off with the *couple*: just over half of the respondents are single or in a short-term relationship, and the frequenting of lesbian and gay bars can be seen as connoted with “being single”. But, of

³ This problem is expressed both in the philosophical positions of either constructivism or essentialism in the study of homosexuality that have been widely debated in various works on the topic - see e.g. Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*, pp. 10-13 - as well as in the choice of access and sampling in various empirical studies - see e.g. the discussion in Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), *Same-sex intimacies*, pp. 200-206.

⁴ See Michele Grigolo. “Sexualities and the ECHR: Introducing the Universal Sexual Legal Subject.” (*European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 14, No. 5, 2003: 1023-1044). He criticises the notion of “homosexual rights” and proposes universal sexual rights as a better alternative.

course, not only lived partnership experiences are of importance; rather, discourses *about* the couple and the role of social and legal recognition are the main interest.

The main problem of this '*bar approach*' is, quite obviously, that it filters out all those who would not frequent gay and lesbian bars. However, this disadvantage, as a bias, on the contrary can be seen as a useful limitation of the scope of what is being looked at: It is a specific type of gay or lesbian we are looking at, namely those frequenting the gay and lesbian *bar scene*.⁵ The findings will therefore need to be linked back to the field that has been under study and will have to be evaluated in this light.⁶ The advantage of approaching people directly in bars and cafés, as compared to other routes of access such as through association or through posting advertisements for participation in the gay press or on gay internet sites, is to avoid limiting the interview sample to respondents *a priori* interested in the study, and to avoid an *implicit* ideological or socio-economic bias, as could be the case in a snowball system in which personal acquaintances of respondents are added to the sample. A set of gay and lesbian bars and cafés has therefore been selected in which respondents have been recruited on a random basis. "Random" here refers to the fact that the respondents are people who happen to be there; some limited selection criteria for a stratified sample will be spelled out below.

One doubt that could be raised about a field that is conceived as "lesbian and gay" is the coherence of considering both female and male homosexuals to constitute one coherent field. Indeed, dependent on the city, gays and lesbians do not go to the same bars, or only in rare cases. Two answers can be given, albeit perhaps not fully conclusive ones. First, there seems to be a reasonable cohesion between lesbian and gay bar culture when indeed the bar culture is concerned, and not sex bars, cruising grounds or gay saunas: these latter ones are generally places of masculine homosexuality and there is no lesbian equivalent. In all four cities there are (at least some) mixed bars. In Rome, the busiest homosexual bar, the *Coming Out*, has a strong lesbian presence which tends to be close to equal to the male gay presence. In Berlin,

⁵ I refer to gays and lesbians throughout, while e.g. bisexuality is no further mentioned. This corresponds to the idea that we are looking at homosexual aspects of identity, which, to be sure, may not exclude heterosexuality altogether; in fact, the majority of the respondents within the study could, depending on the definition, be considered as *bisexual* over their lifetime and a few define themselves as bisexual. The terminology of 'lesbian' and 'gay' represents a simplification here and will be used throughout. In political claims related to homosexuality, in English-speaking countries, one would mainly speak of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) claims. The question of transgender did not arise and is disregarded in this study. One professional drag-queen who was interviewed (see below) fully identified as gay. These points will be returned to at various stages of the analysis.

⁶ These restrictions and what the sample represents on the whole cannot fully be explored, particularly as the sample is not seen as a representative one even within the bar scene. Also, specific types of bars have been chosen.

the bars in the formerly Eastern gay district Prenzlauer Berg are mostly mixed: particularly the *Amsterdam* and the *Schall und Rauch*, and so are the cafés and bars in Kreuzberg. In London, the amount of lesbian bars or lesbian presence in gay bars is minimal compared to the wide male gay bar scene, but one of the most popular bars, the G.A.Y. bar in Soho, has a strong lesbian presence, albeit spatially distinguished from the male one by gathering mainly in the basement lounge; the relatively small but long-established daytime café *First Out* is mainly lesbian but mixed. At the time of interviewing, in Paris, the *Bliss* was mainly lesbian but mixed (it has since shut down); the long-established *Tropic* is more male but relatively mixed, so is the *Okawa*, and a small café-restaurant, *La Petite Vertue*, is also mixed. Respondents were recruited in all of these bars, although also in more male-only or female-only bars. Thus, while differences can be made, and while a wide range of bars is male only, and fewer female only, there seems to be a sense in which the gay and lesbian bar scene, defined as such, is not wholly separated into sexes, and where they are separate, there is a sense of equivalence between the two.

Secondly, the research question is concerned with the meaning which the question of same-sex partnership recognition has for the individual. By definition, both male and female homosexuals are concerned with this development and the debate is largely shared. In a sense, the category that links male and female homosexuality, which is of course a social invention along with the subcategories, is reinforced through the very debates about same-sex partnership and gay marriage: this is why it seems plausible to examine both jointly.

Having said this, the sample is clearly limited to a certain type of gay and lesbian lifestyle, reflecting a difference in types of bars and the role of the bar and café culture in the different cities where the fieldwork was based. Additionally, the specifically European perspective to the topic has guided the choice of a cross-national approach. The field has been restricted to a metropolitan urban environment, but extended to four countries. In short, the four capitals of the four largest EU countries have been included in the sample, Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome. Here, again, the restriction carries an inherent bias which was deliberately adopted: rural areas or even secondary cities have been left aside. Yet again, this introduces a sharp restriction, where the chosen urban environment can be considered, at least relatively speaking, to constitute an avant-garde environment concerning gay and lesbian culture.⁷ While the metropolitan setting constitutes an environment generally seen as more accommodating to

homosexuality, Rome allegedly differs from the other three cities in generally not being referred to as a centre for gay and lesbian culture to the extent that the other three are, which, as an *odd-case*, will allow for a range of comparative elements to be introduced in the analysis.

As became clear in various interviews, many women and men in the metropolitan lesbian and gay bars have lived in smaller towns before – the metropolitan approach hence does not mean that nothing could be said about the provinces, far from it. It is clear however that the discourses will have a meaning that is linked to the city context and would be different if smaller towns had been chosen as a field.⁸

While the restriction to the city makes the sampling easier, the choice of four cities in turn makes it far more complicated. However, the cross-national character of the study constitutes a potential strength because it allows for a shift in perspective away from the national context – in viewing the social change under study as one that transcends the political developments within one specific country. In contrast to national studies, the national cultural, political and legal context is less central to the analysis of the discourses, and elements of broader trends can be detected. As a result, and slightly counter-intuitive for some, the sample reflects a European metropolitan gay and lesbian bar milieu, without aspiring to a strictly comparative methodology. The material from the four cities is instead to a certain extent considered as reflecting one single field within which various social, cultural, gendered, generational and other divides are important.

2.1.2. Representation of homosexuality

Choosing how to approach the study of the recognition of same-sex partnership is closely connected to how homosexuality is presented: without the existence of a preconceived concept of homosexuality, the recognition of same-sex couples would be of merely administrative interest. At the same time, it can itself be seen as a turning point in the representation of homosexuality. In the public discussions on partnership rights, “gay marriage”, but also in TV programmes and in everyday conversation⁹, the homosexual couple has today become a

⁷ See e.g. the discussion on the role of the city in Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), *Same-Sex Intimacies*, pp. 82-86.

⁸ On “provincial” male gay discourses see Bochow (1998), *Schwules Leben in der Provinz*. In the discourses presented here, gay life in the main cities is often described as being superficial and sex-oriented.

⁹ Various national soap operas can be referred to, including *Lindenstraße* (the first in Germany to include a gay character), *Eastenders* or most famously *Queer as Folks* (in the UK), or TV-shows such as *I fantastici cinque* in

standard feature of the representation of homosexuality. This development can equally, or even more so, be observed in social science research in the area of homosexuality: topics such as sexual practices (which had become a central research question since the early years of AIDS), recently seem to have become superseded by literature on partnership, negotiation of life as a couple, marriage ceremonies, lesbian and gay families etc. On the one hand, this project itself falls into this trend; on the other hand, it partly takes it as a starting point for analysis, i.e. to question precisely how from a lesbian and gay perspective, the debate on couples is placed in the larger complex of understanding homosexuality, personal identity and society.

In the following, three – possibly four – idealised turning points of the representation of homosexuality will be outlined, based on standard interpretations of the historical changes on this subject.

2.1.3. Historical outline: shifting representations and unstable categories

The historical context is important to remember for two reasons. First, the construction of meaning around the question of recognition of same-sex couples or questions of homosexuality and society at large are always connected to larger social discourses, in which its various (historical or ideological) definitions mostly coexist. A respondent in one interview for example will possibly be thinking in one way or another about a variety of discourses that s/he has heard about through different sources. Some of these are traditional religious views on homosexuality, psychoanalytical definitions of homosexuality, accounts of repression, liberation and the like. The discourses are always situated in reference to a historical context. Secondly, any study of a phenomenon that is itself viewed as a crucial turning point – a process of “inclusion” that can be read and pinned down in parliamentary documents, legal texts, and media analysis¹⁰ – has to take note of certain broader lines of historical perspectives and the problems of interpretation which they pose. However, a choice of methodology and method also has to reflect the shortcomings and difficulties of the representations that have been proposed in the past as well as in recent debates. Most clearly, a historical outlook should

Italy (modelled on the American *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*). See also: Enrico Salvatori. “Televisione.” in Del Pozzo and Scarlini. *Gay*, pp. 245-249.

¹⁰ This refers to the inclusion of homosexuality into partnership institution, but also into mainstream cultural spaces. See also “normalization”, below, 2.1.4.

incite the researcher to take great caution with the claim to represent homosexuality as such. Instead, the definitions and restrictions of the object under study need to be explicit at all times.

In the perspective of recent history, three main representations can be identified in the representation of homosexuality: first the traditional view of the homosexual as a sinner, secondly the view of the homosexual as a patient, and thirdly, the liberation view of the "coming out". A possible fourth perspective is that of "normalization", in which "liberation" loses its meaning. Such a representation, which has been established in certain historical overviews in the literature on homosexuality, will briefly be outlined in the following.

The traditionalist view is one that has been present in various religious positions down to the present day. Under this view, the individual is not seen as necessarily linked to his or her same-sex desires, but rather as acting on sexual impulses that represent a sin or an aberration – a "crime against nature" or "against God".¹¹ Not to conform to natural societal duties – marriage and the family – is here as much part of the condemnation of homosexuality as are specific sexual acts, and anal sex in particular.¹² The man (or woman, even if it has not been expressed to the same extent) is to be blamed for sexuality which is necessarily non-procreative and therefore against the nature of human sexuality, so the discourse goes. Heterosexuality, on the other hand, is seen as a natural constant or God-given ethical conduct; these latter views have been constituent of various positions against same-sex marriage even very recently.¹³

¹¹ "Crime contre nature" in Leroy-Forgeot (1997), *Histoire juridique*, p. 30-36

¹² Ibid., p. 32 : "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas [...] insist on the notion of nature, principally because it denies the procreative function of sexuality." (Original: "Albert le Grand et saint Thomas d'Acquin [...] insistent sur la notion de nature, principalement parce qu'elle nie la fonction procréatrice de la sexualité.")

¹³ Various sources could be referred to for recent restatements of perspectives that see homosexuality as being against human nature or against God, in one way or another. An influential one has been articulated by Joseph Ratzinger, Catholic Pope since 2005, which can be presented here in an exemplifying way: While not seeing homosexuality itself as a crime, its institutionalisation is described as being at odds with an ethical human constant, threatening to destroy the (natural or God-given) image of humanity, as the following extract shows (from: Joseph Ratzinger. "Die Seele Europas. Für Menschenwürde, Ehe und Familie und das Heilige." *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 20/04/2005): "In a sharp contrast to this stands the desire of homosexual partnerships, which now paradoxically ask for a legal framework that should more or less be equivalent to marriage. With this tendency one exits the entire moral history of humankind, which, despite all the differences in the legal form of marriage still always knew that in its essence it represents the special union of man and woman that opens itself to children and thereby to the family. The question is not one of discrimination, but the question of what the human being is as a man and as a woman and how the union of man and woman can rightly be formed. When, on the one hand, their union becomes more and more detached from legal forms, and when, on the other hand, homosexual partnerships come to be viewed increasingly as on a par with marriage, we stand before the dissolution of the idea of man, the consequences of which can only be most severe." (Original: "In krassem Gegensatz dazu steht das Verlangen homosexueller Lebensgemeinschaften, die nun paradoxerweise eine Rechtsform verlangen, die mehr oder weniger der Ehe gleichgestellt werden soll. Mit dieser Tendenz tritt man aus der gesamten moralischen Geschichte der Menschheit heraus, die bei aller Verschiedenheit der Rechtsformen der Ehe doch immer wusste, dass diese ihrem Wesen nach das besondere Miteinander von Mann und Frau ist, das

From being seen as a sexual sinner, the second representation of the homosexual as a patient represents a turning point. The homosexual (and here the term becomes its contemporary meaning as defining a sexual orientation) is not to be blamed for his homosexuality. The scientific expert discourse arises at the end of the nineteenth century with Freud and medical approaches. It initially "humanizes" homosexuals and focuses on their inner suffering. This discourse is also reflected in various literary accounts.¹⁴ Somewhat perversely, so to speak, the scientific discourse that identifies a sexual "orientation" rather than looking at a sinful behaviour, later gives rise to repressive policies: most extremely and most famously in Nazi Germany, but also in various early post-war prosecutions and state practices such as in the United States and England. The initial 'humanizing' of 'the homosexual' through explanations of his psychological and physical condition had partly become congruent with the construction of the 'invert' or 'pervert' as an outcast rather than a sinner or sexual maniac. This characterization as the scientific invention of the homosexual as a "species" was famously coined by Foucault.¹⁵ Barbagli and Colombo critically discuss Foucault's thesis. First, the moment and source of such a shift seems rather arbitrarily located in the scientific discourse of the 19th century. Secondly, a different description of this shift focuses on how sexual identity is no longer defined with reference to the sexual role within a sexual act (with a man or with a woman) but rather to the sexual orientation (to have sex with either men or women).¹⁶ Barbagli and Colombo also define the "modern homosexual", the object of their study, according to this shift:

In contrast to those of the past, modern homosexuals don't make love to persons of the opposite sex anymore, but only to other homosexuals. They do not take on the role, the clothing and the movements of the other gender anymore, and they no longer present themselves as effeminate men or butch women, but as gays and lesbians. They do not define their behaviour or that of others as active or passive anymore, but as heterosexual or homosexual.¹⁷

sich auf Kinder hin und so auf die Familie hin öffnet. Hier geht es nicht um Diskriminierung, sondern um die Frage, was der Mensch als Mann und Frau ist und wie das Miteinander von Mann und Frau recht geformt werden kann. Wenn einerseits ihr Miteinander sich immer mehr von rechtlichen Formen löst, wenn andererseits homosexuelle Gemeinschaft immer mehr der Ehe gleichrangig angesehen wird, stehen wir vor einer Auflösung des Menschenbildes, deren Folgen nur äußerst gravierend sein können.")

¹⁴ Primarily masculine homosexuality, e.g. James Baldwin. *Giovanni's room*. (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1956), Julien Green. *Jeunesse*. (Paris: Plon, 1974)

¹⁵ Foucault 1976, 42, in Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*, pp. 223f.

¹⁶ See Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*: 223-227, Also Chauncey (1994), *Gay New York*.

¹⁷ Barbagli and Colombo (2001), p. 13. Original: "A differenza di quelli di un tempo, gli omosessuali moderni non fanno più l'amore con le persone dell'altro sesso, ma solo con gli altri omosessuali. Non assumano più il ruolo, l'abbigliamento e le movenze dell'altro genere e non si presentano più come uomini effeminati o donne mascoline, ma come gay e lesbiche. Non definiscono più i comportamenti loro e quelli degli altri come attivi o passivi, ma come eterosessuali o omosessuali."

The modern same-sex couple is therefore identified as one of "reciprocity and equality" ("reciprocità e di egualianza")¹⁸ rather than as one of gender roles and domination – the generalising formulation of which may well be criticised. As we will see in the narratives presented in chapter 4, surely, there still are bisexuals, transvestites, and butch lesbians. But the shift would be on the discursive level, and true as a tendency.

These analyses on when and how representations of homosexuality have shifted are not necessarily contradictory. Also, rather than depicting a historically clearly located shift, discourses still have a parallel continuity within societies today. (See e.g. 3.1 below: Richard on transvestites)

But let us continue in this simplified chronology: The next turn after the "scientific turn" is the 'liberation' turn. It could be seen as allying the defence of difference and identity, on the one hand, with individual choice in disposing of freedom of sexuality and lifestyles more generally, on the other. The climax of this alliance could possibly be seen in the seventies where, in Western culture, lesbian and gay rights blurred into civil rights and feminist movements. The politicised aspect of homosexuality formed a major characteristic of its representation as 'liberation'. Even where homosexuality is presented as private, its representation becomes highly political, if not indeed part of a political project of visibility, coinciding with the feminist critique aimed at politicising the private. In many countries this 'turn' is eventually accompanied by measures of decriminalization and increased tolerance in the political arena. On the personal level, it is accompanied by the "Coming out discourse", where the embracing of a public homosexual identity is associated with liberation and the overcoming of societal prejudice.¹⁹ It combines individual choice with the idea of an inborn (hence unchosen) sexual orientation in the sense of "choosing" to "be what I am" as we will see e.g. in Jason's "coming out" narrative in chapter 6. The liberation turn tragically faced the AIDS epidemic from the eighties onwards and through this the (partial) revival of morally repressive discourses, where disease was seen as a proof of homosexuality being against nature. At the same time, the visibility created through the AIDS crisis and through the need for governmental involvement in questions of gay lifestyle and the role of gay and lesbian associations also provided a

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Plummer (1995), *Telling Sexual Stories*, see pp. 50-61.

platform for a new political dimension of homosexuality and claims for its acceptance in society and recognition on the State level.²⁰

Finally, adding to this, the acceptance in which the liberation trend would have culminated in such a perspective can be thought of as being followed by "normalization" where the French term "banalisation" ("trivialisation", which would be the corresponding English term, is hardly used in this context) more concretely conveys the sense in which normalization is to be understood here:²¹ it becomes a non-issue. Many have made this claim in relation to a range of Western European countries, or specific parts of the US and Canada. For now, such a description, which will be discussed further below, should remain to be seen as a discursive model of how homosexuality is represented - whether it is useful to speak of a "banalization" in this sense can of course be doubted.²²

Changes in representation are sometimes accompanied by changes in terminologies. While the "sodomite" is a "sinner", the "faggot" to be condemned (to be "burnt"), the "homosexual" is a patient, the "gay" (also in referring to lesbian women) is a liberation activist or a discotheque addict, according to some,²³ while the "same-sex" couple are those who share their happiness and watch television together, and so on. Florence Tamagne, in her historical analysis on homosexuality in Berlin, London and Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, points at the problem of vocabulary to describe homosexuals, for example the use in France of "invertis" and "pédéraste".²⁴ George Chauncey goes beyond the question of vocabulary in describing the "fairly and trade" subculture. As he shows, gender roles and gender attitudes are reflected in various ways in the homosexual subculture that was flourishing in the 1920s and 1930s in New York. He points to a difference in substance rather than in vocabulary. The men he talks about (Chauncey's study concern male homosexuality only) see their homosexuality differently as compared to later homosexuals (even though the different views largely coexist

²⁰ Leo Bersani provides such an argument concerning the risks and chances that gay visibility attained through AIDS. Bersani (1995), *Homos*, pp. 12-25.

²¹ It seems indeed difficult to imagine the same contentious debate over the term "banal" as over the term "normal".

²² Concerning the French case, a review of opinion polls in *Le Monde* is entitled: "Après le Pacs, la banalisation de l'homosexualité est en marche..." Clarisse Fabre, *Le Monde*, 28/6/2005. Interestingly, the first number that is cited shows that 61% would be positive about their child being homosexual, up from 41% 10 years earlier. However, 36% still say they would be negative about it. (Poll by IFOP 1995, 1996, 2000 and 2005)

²³ In fictional literature, the image of the gay disco lifestyle has been celebrated most explicitly e.g. in the novels by Alan Hollinghurst. *The Spell*. (London: Penguin, 1998) or Vincent Borel. *Un Ruban Noir*. (Paris: Actes Sud, 1995)

²⁴ Tamagne, *Histoire* (2000), p. 7.

to some extent): their identification according to gender (masculine as opposed to feminine) prevails over a definition based on sexual identity (homosexual as opposed to heterosexual).²⁵

2.1.4. Debates on "normalization"

Concerning the concept of homosexuality itself, a process of "normalization" has been referred to in different ways. It is difficult to measure the truth of what many have described as a "normalization" of homosexuality, if what is meant is the increased organisation of homosexual intimacy in conventional social patterns in the Western world.²⁶ Henning Bech distinguishes two forms of normalization:

- 1) "same-sex desires and practices are increasingly being considered socially legitimate, provided they are constructed in accordance with comparatively moralistic norms of social conduct."
- 2) "Lifestyles [...] among the majority are rapidly approaching those that, hitherto, were specifically characteristic of the homosexual (for instance living outside 'traditional' nuclear family and gender structures)."²⁷

In these two forms of normalization, the actor is 'society at large', rather than homosexuals changing their ways of life: in the first, society opens social institution to homosexual forms of life, in the second it is society at large that moves towards non-conventional behaviour. In other words, the practices themselves are not considered as a factor of normalization – they may at most be a consequence of the first view.

Instead, a different kind of normalization can refer to the changing practices of homosexual practices themselves as being the prime factor. It is sometimes vaguely referred to as a conservative argument for same-sex marriage, "maturity" of the lesbian and gay movement.²⁸ Alternatively this change can be viewed as the feared conservative consequence of the right to

²⁵ Chauncey describes this shift as a main finding on his study: Chauncey (1994), *Gay New York*, see e.g. pp. 12-16 and 119-221.

²⁶ See e.g. Seidman, Meeks and Traschen: "Beyond the Closet? The Changing Social Meaning of Homosexuality in the United States", *Sexualities*, 1999, 2 (1): 9-34.

²⁷ Henning Bech, "Commentaries on Seidman, Meeks and Traschen: 'Beyond the Closet'", *Sexualities*, 1999, 2 (3).

²⁸ See e.g. Andrew Sullivan, "The Marriage Moment", *Advocate*, 20 January 1998, pp. 61-63; see in particular also Michael Warner's critique of Sullivan, *Advocate*, 20 January 1998, or in Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An argument about homosexuality*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1995 and Michael Warner, *The trouble with*

marriage and thus as the consequence of the first of Henning Bech's definitions of normalization. The worry about such a "conservative" impact of institutional change has been the main driving force behind the gay and lesbian anti-marriage position, re-articulated in various ways in many recent queer theory approaches and presenting the threat of normalization through marriage as in the following example: "Is it ever possible to pursue marriage as something other than a strategy to normalize gay sexuality [...]?"²⁹ Same-sex marriage is thus seen as a means of controlling social behaviour and pressing it into conformity.

These debates on normalization highlight the problems around the question of what is representative of homosexuality, and often implies the notion of what should be seen as "normal homosexuality". Clearly, the long-term couple is the rising star in the representation of contemporary homosexuality, the loving, "marriage-seeking" same-sex partners have (in media representation) become the incarnation of homosexual happiness.³⁰ As a result, arguments about who represents lesbian and gay life are tightly linked to normative questions as an "inner-community" debate that appears to stand for a colourful variety of forms of intimate lives, or alternatively as a symptom of a growing inappropriateness of the term "community".

For the sociologist, it is a difficult task to try to position oneself within these debates. An alternative is to work with definitions that discard the claim to a larger representation of homosexuality, and instead, as discussed above, to consider certain practices as defining features. Deciding on which social practice is taken as a defining feature should then not be confused with the question of how 'all' homosexuals are most justly represented, and even less of how they 'should' be represented. Instead, it becomes a field for sociological research as any other that could be chosen according to a different criterion. While there is no clear-cut solution to this problem, simplistic solutions should be avoided and the limits of each research approach be pointed out.

normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000, particularly pp. 81-147 "Beyond Gay Marriage".

²⁹ Michael Warner. (*The Advocate*, 20 January 1998, 158)

³⁰ As an example of this media image see e.g. the coverage on Elton John and his partner David Furnish's Civil Partnership ceremony: "The Windsor wedding of the year." *The Guardian* 22/12/2005, front cover with picture and p. 3, by Patrick Barkham: "Civil, understated and in the shadow of Windsor Castle, it was a partnership the Queen would probably approve of. [...] Sir Elton blew kisses and waved back the crowd's affection."

What has to be avoided is a one-dimensional definition of homosexual identity: two axes of multidimensionality have to be taken into account.

- 1) The definition of a homosexual identity applies to fundamentally different men and women.
- 2) The definition of homosexuality (potentially) applies to different aspects of an individual's identity.

While the first axis is generally acknowledged with references to diversity, the second axis, concerning the question of the individual's different social spheres, is often overlooked in defining homosexual identities.

The historical overview of the shifts in the representation and the debates about the "normalization" of homosexuality has been very schematic here and merely exemplifies types of discourses. A final observation concerns the question of the extent to which male and female homosexuality are or should be viewed differently. One would have to expand particularly on the different representations of male and female homosexuality, on legal differentiations and of the different forms of milieus that have developed at different times in history. This would go beyond the scope of this project. However, it can be argued that the notions of "sexual orientation", "liberation", and "normalization" constitute an important plank of male and female homosexuality. "Same-sex love" represents lesbian and gay identities as conceptual equivalents thereby moving beyond the recrimination of sexual sins that had often viewed male and female homosexuality in very different lights.³¹ The shared category of female and male homosexuality is also particularly evident in the debates about the recognition of same-sex partnerships. As has been discussed above, the empirical part of this research consequently includes both lesbian women and gay men.

One further question that may be raised here is whether these historical shifts ultimately concern primarily the phenomenon itself or more significantly a shift in its representation. And in turn, if such a dramatic shift in how homosexuality is lived has occurred, one could go further and ask whether we are actually speaking about the same phenomenon at all. For now, however, the review of historical shifts in the representation of homosexuality will be kept in

³¹ Female homosexuality often (but not always) faced lower degrees of prosecution and less severe punishment compared to male homosexuality.

mind for the conceptualisation of the empirical study. What consequences do these considerations have for the methodological choices of the study?

2.1.5. What are the consequences for methodological choices?

The different historical discourses we have reviewed tend to superimpose rather than replace one another, as all representations remain available throughout. They do this very dramatically if one extends the analysis to non-Western discourses.³² However one should note that the scientific discourse has enjoyed great attention in historians' works on 'modern homosexuality', facilitated by the fact that the expert language is accompanied by the greatest amount of sources available through the documentation of 'patient' cases in addition to police reports and court decisions. "Problematized" homosexuality has thereby been *kept on file*. Florence Tamagne points to this difficulty of studying homosexual practices through the available discourses, literary, medical or judicial:

In order to avoid linguistic traps it is necessary to indulge in a systematic critique of the sources that are themselves mental constructions, which are historically and geographically located.³³

This seemingly self-evident necessity of critical distance from the sources is particularly crucial in the study of a subject so closely linked to secrecy and privacy, taboo and even fear, where the study of fictional literature of the time has often become a main approach to the historical representation of homosexuality, i.e. fiction represents the alternative main source of social history on homosexuality next to medical, judicial and psychological documentations. The problem of how to represent lesbians and gays justly is recurrent and to a large extent unsolvable if homosexuality 'in general' is to be grasped. David Halperin rightly suggests that in the contemporary world, homosexuality is a concept that refers to an "unstable conjunction" of "a psychological condition, an erotic desire and a series of practices".³⁴

Jeffrey Weeks points to this difficulty and indicates that the problem is particularly relevant for quantitative approaches:

³² See e.g. Bochow and Marbach, eds. (2003), *Islam und Homosexualität*.

³³ Florence Tamagne, "Homosexualités, le difficile passage de l'analyse des discours à l'étude des pratiques", in (*Histoire et Société, revue européenne d'histoire sociale*, no. 3, 2002 : 6-21), quote on p. 21. Original: "Pour déjouer les pièges du langage, il est nécessaire de se livrer à une critique systématique des sources qui sont elles-mêmes produit de constructions mentales, historiquement et géographiquement datées."

³⁴ "Conjunction instable", David Halperin as noted in *Histoire et Société, Revue européenne d'histoire sociale*, no. 3, 2002, p. 39.

Quantitative studies based on surveys are notoriously difficult in relation to homosexuality, not least because of the problems of establishing a sampling frame for a 'hidden' population, and defining what is meant by a homosexual lifestyle [...]. Also, work on the nature of non-heterosexual identities that has been carried out over the past twenty years (e.g., Plummer 1981, 1992; Porter and Weeks 1990; Weeks 1991, 1995) has demonstrated the shifting and problematic nature of such identities (as indeed all identities), and the central importance given to self-definition.³⁵

Weeks is surely right in arguing that qualitative approaches can more easily grasp 'shifting and problematic' aspects in defining homosexuality. But it is not clear why the difficulty of a sampling frame should be any less problematic in *qualitative* studies. Often, and particularly also in qualitative studies, assumptions about the recurrence of certain phenomena are made. The choice in defining what homosexuality actually is then largely predetermines the research findings of how homosexuality is lived.

Erving Goffman, in referring to homosexuals as an example of his inquiry into 'deviance', points out in a footnote that the general use of the term is "much too broad and heterogeneous a categorization", and defines instead communities that are "organized around the pursuit and entertainment of [desirable sexual objects of one's own sex]".³⁶ These, he argues are those in "custodial institutions" and "the male and female 'gay' worlds sustained in urban centers."³⁷ In other words, Goffman is considering homosexuality as a useful category for the sociology of deviance as a practice-based community rather than as an individual-based feature.

Having taken on board these considerations, one can conclude that two viable alternatives remain in the sociological treatment of homosexuality. A first approach deals with the use of the concept as such, evaluating its uses and the (changing) representations of homosexuality; the rise of the "same-sex couple" as a political momentum helps to theorise these shifts. A second approach accepts the view that the concept is ultimately 'unstable' and defines certain practices as characterising the persons that are part of the group under study. A practice can also be determined in relation to how people describe themselves (saying they are 'lesbian' or 'gay', "self-definition" as Weeks points out), or as to what sexual practices are implied, or yet again as to what places they go to.

Questions that arise once a "working definition" of the field has been established are those of access and sampling, which are more complicated for some definitions than for other ones,

³⁵ Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2002), *Same-sex intimacies*, p. 200..

³⁶ Goffman (1963), *Stigma*, p. 170f in footnote 7.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 171.

especially if we want to look at characteristics such as “hidden” practices. The bar and café scene indeed represents a relatively open, easily accessible and limited field.

2.2. Research Field

2.2.1. *Choice of field*

It is thus in accordance with these considerations that this study focuses on a specific ‘field’ for its empirical part. Beyond the choice of the café and bar milieu, further restrictions were necessary, in particular through the choice of the geographical location of the bars. This section will expand on the reasoning and the practicalities in defining the field – the choice of the bars and cafés in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome.

The existence of lesbian and gay life in the bars and cafés of major European capitals is a phenomenon that combines the commonplace idea that this is what homosexuality is about with that of a comparatively easy access in geographically delimited and traceable places. Of course, other fields than bars and cafés can be chosen. Discotheques, public cruising areas, gay saunas, internet chat sites, political or cultural gay and lesbian associations, prisons, male prostitution etc., would equally constitute possible research fields related to homosexuality.³⁸ However, in constituting such a list, the wrong impression could arise that a ‘representative’ study could be undertaken through the combining of all these fields. Instead, of course, some of the fields are structured around very different concepts, and the researcher would end up (badly) representing a variety of fields s/he imposes as being relevant to the study of homosexuality.

In order to avoid this, we have chosen to look at the question of the recognition of same-sex couples through a fieldwork approach that focuses on individuals from lesbian and gay bars in metropolitan Western European milieus. This focus does not necessarily appear to be surprising or extreme. Yet, the concepts that underlie this choice, as much as the specific strategies of access need to be spelled out throughout the project: in narrowing down the

³⁸ The prison environment may appear more controversial as an example here, but is an important field in sociological studies on homosexual practices. For a good overview see e.g. Christopher Hensley, Cindy Struckman-Johnson and Helen M. Eigenberg. “Introduction: The History of Prison Sex Research.” (*The Prison Journal*, Vol. 80, No. 4, December 2000: 360-367). They outline trends in research that show a gendered difference with high rates of consensual sexual relationships in women’s prisons showed, often along gendered

research question, in the conducting of fieldwork, and in the analysis and interpretation of the results.

As a consequence of this choice, the research is biased towards people who go to bars and cafés and the empirical access is largely limited to this clearly defined field, and some relevant type of people might be underrepresented, such as for example specific kinds of long-term couples (who will be less frequently going to bars than singles) or lesbians and gays of comparatively older age.³⁹

2.2.2. Cities

In addition to the focus on bars and cafés, metropolitan cities were chosen. Focusing on what has been defined as a 'recognition trend' the study explicitly looks at a geographically defined high degree of acceptance of homosexual lifestyles. The easiest delimitation of an 'avant-garde' environment in the recognition of same-sex relationships, and also most suitable for the scope of this research in terms of practicability, is that of a lesbian and gay European metropolitan culture. Most would here refer to a range of Western European cities with long-standing traditions of homosexual subcultures. The reasons that behind the choice of Berlin, London, Paris and Rome will be explained below.

Of course, homosexual subcultures also exist in the countryside or in small urban centres.⁴⁰ If these are not located in clearly labelled bars or clubs, often there are implicit meeting areas or increasing levels of social and sexual activities organized through internet platforms. The internet in particular undermines the geographical isolation attributed to the countryside in this respect, or at least has the potential to do so in the long run. The city, however, is host to a specific type of gay and lesbian scene. Didier Eribon engages with Henning Bech's works when he states:

Homosexuality is inherently linked to the city. As the Danish sociologist Henning Bech writes, "the city is the world of the homosexual, his vital space. It is useless to object that many homosexuals have lived on the countryside. To the extent that they want to be homosexuals,

roles (the "butch" and the "femme", p. 361) but more description of sexual assault in men's prisons: "Weiss and Friar (1974) concluded that "homosexual rape" was "rampant" in the prison environment." (p. 362).

³⁹ See e.g. Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*, p. 192 or Bochow (1998) "Schwule über 44", p. 223f. It should be added that the bar scene chosen here still allowed for a relatively wide age range – contrary to discotheques. As Thorsten (Berlin, 71), one of the respondents observed: "Well, I go to some bars, and here and there, but I mean to go to a disco at 71, you'd get odd looks now." (He was contacted at the bar "Stiller Don" in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg where he goes with some regularity.)

⁴⁰ See for example specifically on male gay provincial life: Bochow (1998), *Schwules Leben in der Provinz*.

the vast majority of them have to go to the city, in one way or another... " (H. Bech, *When men meet*, p. 95) This obviously does not mean that there could not be gay life in small towns or even on the countryside. [...] But it is nevertheless the big city that has provided the possibilities for gay lifestyles to develop fully. [...] And it is striking to note that today we are witnessing a re-opening of that world towards the outside, if it were only for their great visibility: nobody can fail to notice any longer that there are gay cafés and gay bars, gay neighbourhoods, and this subculture is thus in permanent contact with the city as a whole.⁴¹

What can be interpreted into Bech's and Eribon's words is that the distinction between city and countryside is not about the presence of homosexuality and homosexuals in the former and their absence in the latter. Instead, as Bech says, it is about the way they are leading a homosexual lifestyle; in Eribon's terms it is also about the specific form of visibility which gays (and lesbians) have by being part of the city's gay subculture. The view that relates "gay and lesbian culture" as such to the city should not be taken as absolute. Such a limitation may also be subject to fast-paced change. However, it is a rationale this study subscribes to in limiting its empirical access.

Finally, respondents from the city's lesbian and gay café and bar scene often originate from elsewhere.⁴² Recruiting respondents from cafés in the main cities will therefore also allow for discourses about lesbian and gay life in the countryside or in provincial towns if this is where the respondents are from or have spent part of their lives. However, to the extent that they bring insights about the city-country divide, they will remain metropolitan discourses about provinces in this respect.

2.2.3. *Four capitals*

Now, which cities should one include? One important aspect has been a practical one. Based on the idea of researching a phenomenon within a European social space, the languages and the feasibility of research in the four countries, including interviews and literature research on the cultural and linguistic contexts were a large determinant factor in deciding on the four countries.

⁴¹ Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*, p. 37f. Original: "L'homosexualité a partie liée avec la ville. Comme l'écrit le sociologue danois Henning Bech, « la ville est le monde social propre à l'homosexuel, son espace vital. Il ne sert à rien d'objecter que de nombreux homosexuels ont vécu à la campagne. Dans la mesure où ils veulent être homosexuels, la grande majorité d'entre eux doit aller à la ville, d'une manière ou d'une autre... » (H. Bech [1997], *When men meet*, p. 95) Cela ne signifie évidemment pas qu'il ne saurait y avoir de vie gay dans les petites villes ou même à la campagne. [...] C'est néanmoins la grande ville qui a donné aux modes de vie gays la possibilité de se développer pleinement. [...] Et il est frappant de constater que l'on assiste aujourd'hui à une réouverture de ce monde vers l'extérieur, ne serait-ce que par l'effet de sa très grande visibilité : nul n'ignore désormais qu'il existe des cafés et des bars gays, des quartier gays, et cette subculture est donc au contact permanent de la ville dans son ensemble." See also Bech (1997), *When Men meet*.

A tension resulting from the choice of Berlin, London, Paris and Rome arises in representing one field and a strong cultural difference: On the one hand, they all bear resemblances in their status as capitals and major cities in a Western European context.⁴³ On the other hand, different cultural contexts apply to all four, and Rome in particular is much less connected to the idea of homosexual movements compared to the other three cities. Nevertheless, the four cities represent a coherent field in many respects. The four countries have all had current legal changes concerning homosexuality and/or national debates about such changes. In the UK these changes have been very significant; in France and Germany they have been more limited, or insufficient according to lesbian and gay associations; and in Italy there has not yet been any legal change, as noted in chapter 1. While the respective debates have taken place along similar lines, the legal situations represent just about the whole range of legal recognition within Western European countries.

Today, these four cities possess a well-established lesbian and gay culture, with a range of gay and lesbian locations, associations, political and social manifestations such as gay pride parades, etc. One can refer to them as "gay capitals".⁴⁴ Other cities are also referred to as 'lesbian and gay capitals', such as Amsterdam, Cologne, Bologna, Manchester, Barcelona, Milan or Madrid. These should also be considered in defining lesbian and gay European urban culture. However, at least London, Paris and Berlin most clearly fall under this criterion: London because it represents the liveliest homosexual scene in Europe at least since the 1990s, Paris and Berlin for the large lesbian and gay scenes in both cities and also for their long history of homosexual milieus and movements. Rome as a fourth city is selected on a similar line, as a large capital of a major European country and with arguably the largest lesbian and gay population for an Italian city.⁴⁵ While Milan is sometimes noted to have a larger 'scene' for the number of lesbian and gay locations, and Bologna if considered proportional to population size,⁴⁶ it was judged that if in doubt, the choice of the capital and main city would provide the most consistent rationale for including Italy in the study. The main advantage of

⁴² Indeed, a majority of those interviewed for this study were not born in the respective capital.

⁴³ On the basis of population size Russia and Turkey would have to be included. However, both geographically and culturally, the focus of the study would be a different one (both countries are non-EU and most of their territory lies on the Asian continent). Particularly concerning lesbian and gay culture, the four countries chosen here much more clearly correspond to the idea of a common (Western European) cultural space, with high mobility and similar political debates on the topic of homosexual rights.

⁴⁴ Barbagli and Colombo use this term, where Rome figures as a "gay capital" amongst others in the Italian context. See Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*, p. 193-196.

⁴⁵ Despite a lower proportional homosexual presence, this can be concluded from the data presented in Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*, p. 194.

extending the project to Rome as a fourth city was to include a national context where there was no recognition on the legal level.⁴⁷

This choice of different cities proves to be extremely useful in characterizing debates over the recognition of same-sex couples: it helps to show how the debate transcends national boundaries and how, in this Western European context, the discourses demonstrate a high degree of unity on this matter from one country to the next despite a number of differences. The notion of *one* 'metropolitan gay and lesbian bar milieu' has partly been reaffirmed in various field experiences where respondents easily referred to other cities (particularly those named as potential "gay capitals" above); they have experienced lesbian and gay life there, have friends there, or even consider them as possible places where they could live. This cosmopolitan aspect of the bar milieu that we will be looking at will become clear in chapters 3 and 4. Within the EU countries, the opportunity for mobility seems to be taken up by lesbians and gays more than in the population at large, and in this milieu particularly so.

Research findings equally point to the presence of similar differences and conflicting views within each of the cities. The various country-specific references to political debates, public figures and media coverage allow the study to go beyond the analysis within one national framework that is most often a priori considered, particularly in sociology. The scope of the project has therefore the important advantage of bringing along a part of originality that complements other fruitful studies in country-specific contexts.

Florence Tamagne in her study of homosexuality in Berlin, London and Paris in the 1920s and 1930s explains her research choice along similar lines:

Thus, based on the example of three countries that have been seen as representative, one could draw a map of homosexuality of the inter-war period, define the models, a way to think and live homosexuality common to the three countries. This perspective seemed richer than an isolated national study, impervious to outside influences and incapable of distinguishing between the specific and the general.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ In the case of the UK legal recognition of partnership was not in place but foreseeable and in the legislative process at the time of the fieldwork.

⁴⁸ Tamagne (2000), *Histoire*, p. 15. Original: "Ainsi, à partir de l'exemple de trois pays, choisis comme représentatifs, on pourrait dessiner une carte de l'homosexualité dans l'entre-deux-guerres, définir des modèles, une façon de penser et de vivre l'homosexualité commune aux trois pays. Cette perspective semblait plus riche qu'une étude nationale isolée, imperméable aux influences extérieurs et incapable de séparer le spécifique du général."

In considering Tamagne's reasoning for the 1920s and 1930s, there are of course many reasons to believe that the commonness of homosexual life in these cities is not new, but perhaps even more relevant today: because of political and economic ties, high mobility and shared media representations. The field of homosexuality and the interconnectedness that was inherent to it throughout the 20th century⁴⁹ has arguably reached a different degree through the accessibility and the democratisation of such mobility both due to the freedom of movement, access to Labour markets within the EU, the drastically decreased cost of travel, and the communications revolution. One of the respondents, Miguel can be cited as an example: his life plans reflect a perspective on mobility that includes pan-European career options and cross-national internet dating with the aim of intimacy construction:

Miguel (London, 23)

I've been living here [in London] for one year now. I used to work [in Spain], and then in Andorra [...] I came here to improve my English- And the next step is Berlin, next year, to live there. Yeah. [...] I have a lovely boyfriend. German obviously, that's the reason I'm moving. [...] We met on the net in March. And we met face to face in June. [The interview was held in October 2004] In June we started something, but not a formal relationship. - And we needed to know each other better. So from June to August we were talking on the phone every day. One hour, two hours. And finally in August, I went there again, and I met all his family, and since the 14th of August I'm married. [laughs] Not married, no. We are together. [...] He lives close to Berlin, that's the reason I'm going there.

Antonio represents such a fast-paced European gay identity. He explores to a maximum both the freedom of movement in deciding on a workplace within the EU and uses the technological possibilities that smash geographical distances even on the love market. While it may be an extreme case, it reflects a certain social reality, at least for some within the sample of the study. A cosmopolitan dimension is closely linked to the field, as will also become clear through other interview extracts where respondents make cross-references, tell of their experiences abroad, or have foreign partners.⁵⁰

Having established a working conception of a gay and lesbian milieu, the following section briefly examines the methodology employed in the fieldwork.

⁴⁹ In literature presentations, one may think of Christopher Isherwood's accounts of Germany during the Weimar era - most famously in Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (London: New Phoenix Library, 1939) and also the cosmopolitan account in James Baldwin, *Giovanni's room*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001 [1956]) portraying a (tragic) love story between an American with an Italian waiter in a Parisian gay bar. Various other examples could of course be mentioned.

⁵⁰ On mixed couples and homosexuality more generally see also Judith Stacey(2004), *Cruising to Familyland*.

2.2.4. Qualitative approach and in-depth interviews

The approach and method of the fieldwork are closely connected to the research question and serve to diversify the sample within the restricted field. First, a qualitative approach here implies that in depth interviews rather than a quantitative survey constitute the empirical access to the field. Secondly, out of various options of access, such as snowball methods, where preliminary contacts are used to reach further respondents for the study, or strict random sampling, a (flexible) stratified random sampling approach was adopted. Thirdly, semi-structured in-depth interviews were preferred to various methods for data collection, such as questionnaires, participant observation, or open-ended interviews.

What is the reasoning behind opting for a qualitative approach, as opposed to a quantitative one? A qualitative approach through interviews was chosen for three reasons. First, the complexity and fluidity of the connections between intimacy and social change, and between identity and the state from an individual perspective, seem difficult to grasp through survey-based research. These connections become more apparent in a detailed study of the individual's discourses and narratives. Secondly, the scope of this research project did not allow for an extensive quantitative representation of frequenters of lesbian and gay locations, such as in Barbagli's study.⁵¹ Also, on a smaller scale, this would be even less feasible when including four countries. The subject matter of study, i.e. homosexuality and intimate life plans (where the latter term refers to how individuals project themselves into relationships, family life or other type of social networks) is best addressed through in-depth interviews, where nuances between lived experiences, plans, desires, wishes and political statements concerning a sometimes private, sometimes secretive or controversial topic of personal life are more easily grasped.

Consequently, the results will be based on narratives that leave space for the interconnecting of themes according to individuals' understanding of the issues involved, notably on the interpretation of the role of legal recognition. However, this openness is framed by the preconceived theoretical frameworks that have been discussed for this purpose. Meinefeld provides a good analysis of the role of 'openness' in qualitative research:

While in quantitative methodology, the researcher's necessity to control and structure his researcher activity consciously stand in the foreground [...], qualitative methods require

⁵¹ Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*. Their survey included 3502 respondents, p. 283.

primarily that the appropriateness of the categories that a the researcher uses, as well as his openness for the potential "otherness" of the field of research be secured.⁵²

This view contrasts with an understanding of fieldwork as creating the theoretical framework somehow from scratch, or 'grounded' within the empirical findings themselves.⁵³ A theoretical understanding that frames the research is therefore made explicit in the structuring of the questionnaire guide. The themes addressed through a questionnaire guide imply a conceptual understanding of the topic of the recognition of same-sex couples.

The different elements of the questionnaire guide are linked to the ways the question is addressed in the literature, i.e. to how meaning has mostly been constructed around the recognition of same-sex couples. They represent the researcher's preconceived understanding of the phenomenon. However, the multitude of chosen themes covers a vast range of aspects. This in turn throws up problems and advantages. A first advantage of touching on various potentially relevant themes is that it allows for an exploration of the importance which the respondent gives to the thematic area, even if they are preconceived in a questionnaire guide. For instance, the question of adopting children or how "out" or not the respondent is in her work environment are not by definition linked to the legal recognition of partnership, although they are often associated with it. The second advantage is that the broad range of subjects corresponds most appropriately to the research question of how the recognition of same-sex couples is understood. A major problem consists of the time constraints that increase with the scope of themes in the interview: a full exploration of the themes easily requires interviews that last much longer than one hour. This in turn poses problems for the availability of respondents, particularly the "less interested" ones. Finally, the format of qualitative semi-structured interviews with a wider thematic range facilitates an explorative view of sociological research, which is sometimes defined as hypothesis-generating. Ideas might arise through the fieldwork which were not envisaged in the original set-up.

Participant observation seemed less useful for working on the analysis of socio-political discourses.⁵⁴ However, interview situations and the way in which they are set up always

⁵² Werner Meinefeld. "Hypothesen und Vorwissen in der qualitativen Sozialforschung." Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff and Ines Steinke (eds.). *Qualitative Forschung*. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2000), see p. 267. Original: "Steht in der quantitativen Methodologie die Notwendigkeit der Kontrolle des Forschers und der bewussten Strukturierung des Forschungshandelns im Vordergrund [...], so fordern qualitative Methodologen primär die Sicherstellung der Angemessenheit der vom Forscher verwendeten Kategorien und seine Offenheit für das potenziell „Andere“ des Forschungsfeldes."

⁵³ Ibid., p. 268: as e.g. in Glaser und Strauss (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*.

⁵⁴ On participant observation as a method, see e.g. Christian Lüders. "Beobachtung im Feld." Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff and Ines Steinke (eds.). *Qualitative Forschung*. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2000: 383-401)

incorporate an element of participation, which logically interferes with the narrative production and contributes to the situating of the discourses – sometimes evaluating their meaning on the basis of elements that arise through "being in the field".⁵⁵ The role the researcher has as an "observer" indeed enters the research process at all stages: in a preconceived understanding of the question, in the interview setting, and in the reading (or analysis) of the resulting data.⁵⁶ While this aspect will not be fully developed, the link between discourse and behaviour and the evaluation thereof will be discussed further down in the analysis through the use of concrete examples (see particularly 2.3.2 and 4.4.4).

2.2.5. The rationale in conceiving a questionnaire guide

The design of the questionnaire guide (see appendix II), which was used as a framing tool for the interviews, reflects the holistic scope the question aims at. Analysing the influence that recognition debates have on identity construction, life plans and how they are incorporated into individuals' discourse about the couple, the family and homosexuality in society will necessarily require us to touch on a broad range of topics. There needs to be sufficient space for a respondent-based expansion of some of the themes which might be particularly important to him or her. Furthermore, new themes that had not been considered as central to the question at the outset might be brought up and will be developed by adjusting the interviewing practice. An attempt has thus been made to include the openness of free conversation to the largest possible extent in the construction of the questionnaire guide.⁵⁷ In practice however, this last factor has not proven capable of drastically altering the thematic outline; the themes have remained roughly the same throughout the fieldwork process.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. (London: Routledge, 1922). Malinowski's ethnography counts as foundational of participant observation as a social science method.

⁵⁶ On observation and the need of a role as a "disinterested observer", by contrast, see e.g. Alfred Schütz. "Common-sense and Scientific Interpretations of Human action." Maurice Natanson (ed.). *Alfred Schütz. Collected Papers*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p. 26-27. "The social scientist [...] has to develop specific methods for the building of his constructs in order to assure their applicability for the interpretation of the subjective meaning the observed acts have for the actors." (quote on p. 27) Random selection, stratification, and comparable interview conditions are indeed understood in this project as constructs that help a scientific understanding of a certain reality, forcing the researcher to go beyond "common-sense" knowledge about the field, in a process of distancing himself from it.

⁵⁷ Werner Meinefeld, *Hypothesen und Vorwissen* (2000) Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke, eds. (2000), *Qualitative Forschung*, p. 272: "Being open to the new does not necessarily depend on not having become conscious of the old and the known on the level of the content, but depends on the way in which we construct the search for the new methodically." (Original: "Die Offenheit für das Neue hängt gerade nicht davon ab, dass wir auf der inhaltlichen Ebene das Alte und Bekannte nicht bewusst gemacht haben, sondern davon, in welcher Weise wir die Suche nach dem Neuen methodisch gestalten.") Ibid..

The themes taken into the interview situations are the following:

- **Normative frames:** How and with what normative frames are the legal changes portrayed?
- **Social Change:** What accounts are given of the non-acceptance and acceptance of homosexuality over time?
- **Couple life:** What frames are provided to describe the lived (present and past) couple experiences?
- **Projection:** What perspectives are given to partnership (real or hypothetical ones)?
- **Public identity:** How are lesbian/gay public/private identities constructed in different social spheres?

In the initial questionnaire guide, photographs were used to stimulate the relaunching of certain topics towards the end of the interview. The pictures were however not used throughout because of time constraints (see discussion in 2.3.5. on the use of pictures).

While the questionnaire guide was framed in a sufficiently open manner so as to allow for new aspects and contexts to be brought up, these themes, as pre-established categories with which the researcher approaches the understanding of the social phenomenon inevitably influence, or even co-determine, the creation of data.⁵⁸ The resulting narratives thus have to be understood as dependent on the role of the interviewer. As Holstein and Gubrium point out:

Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge – treasuries of information awaiting excavation, so to speak – as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers.⁵⁹

The interviewer therefore has to be viewed as an active participant in the interview. As Holstein and Gubrium indeed argue that “any technical attempts to strip interviews of their interactional ingredients will be futile”.⁶⁰ Instead, the interviewer plays an important role in the production of interview data, even if he or she attempts to adopt a neutral stance:

While the respondent actively constructs and assembles answers, he or she does not simply ‘break out’ talking. Neither elaborate narratives nor one-word replies emerge without provocation. The active interviewer’s role is to incite respondents’ answers, virtually activating narrative production.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Compare: *ibid.*, p. 269: “Insights about social phenomena do not ‘emerge’ through their own force; they are always the researcher’s constructs from the start.” (Original: “Erkenntnisse über soziale Phänomene ‚emergieren‘ nicht aus eigener Kraft, sie sind Konstruktionen des Forschers von Anfang an.”) See also p. 271: “It is always only possible to understand other persons’ categories on the basis of one’s own categories.” (Original: “Es ist immer nur möglich, die Kategorien anderer Personen auf der Basis der eigenen Kategorien zu verstehen.”)

⁵⁹ James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, ‘Active Interviewing’ in Darin Weinberg, *Qualitative Research Methods*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2002, 113.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

It follows from this first that it is necessary to use the role of the interviewer in stimulating narratives to benefit the quality of the results; this forms the rationale for a flexible questionnaire guide. Questions can be changed as much as necessary by adapting to the interviewee in order to gain valuable data through a conversational form. Second, in the analysis of the interviews, the role, position, and possibly "supposed" views of the interviewer will have to be taken into account. For example, the interest of the researcher in the topic and the fact that interviewees will be contacted through lesbian and gay locations are likely to have an impact on discourses on the topic. They are elements that trigger certain discourses, different to those that would be formed if the interview situation was viewed as an 'outside' context. In addition, the way that the researcher is perceived by the interviewee could, for example, activate discourses that are influenced by the aim to please the interviewee or, on the contrary, to oppose the rationale of the research enterprise by highlighting a presumed different view.⁶² The perceived position of the interviewer in relation to the field thereby has a direct impact on the resulting discourses.

2.2.6. What kind of respondents?

It follows from the research question that those targeted were individuals to whom the recognition of same-sex couples has a personal relevance, i.e. lesbians or gays or individuals who identify with homosexual life plans in any other way. This means, as we had briefly mentioned above, that those who identify themselves as, for example, bisexuals or reject the labels proposed here on any grounds will not be excluded from the research. Neither will this exclude respondents who reject ideas of partnership as implied in partnership recognition or those who reject same-sex partnership laws for any other reason. The aim is to talk to those people who feel that partnership recognition laws are somehow "for them" or "meant to be for them", at least potentially. This also implies a certain degree of openness about their sexuality and a public representation of their non-heterosexuality which justifies that certain forms of 'hidden' homosexuality is excluded from the study, e.g. men who engage in homosexual activity but never socialise in homosexual setting other than those of casual sexual encounters and never declare themselves homo- or bisexual to others. Because the different meanings that partnership recognition can have are of interest to the study, and the question of projecting oneself into a partnership, the study focuses explicitly on individuals, and not on couples. Individual respondents will then be either singles or part of a couple, but generally be

⁶² This should not be understood as a falsification, but instead in the sense of multiple discourses available to the

interviewed without the partner.⁶³ The question over whether some of the respondents have *registered* a partnership under the available legal possibilities will be disregarded in the stratification guide for several reasons: it would be difficult to estimate the proportion that 'registered' individuals should be accorded in the research design; their registration might be the expression of pragmatic reasons that do not form a stringent rationale for a differentiation along those lines, and the availability of legal options differs in the country-specific contexts, as does their 'popularity'. At this point then, it was left open whether any gay or lesbian who had actually registered a partnership would be included in the interview sample. Also, the legal option was available at the time neither in Italy nor in the UK (before December 2005). In the resulting material, out of 47 randomly approached respondents, four had been previously married to a partner of the opposite sex but were divorced, and one had been registered with his homosexual partner in Denmark before moving to London, and had also divorced. One interviewee contacted through an alternative snow-ball method had registered his same-sex partnership in Berlin (see below).

2.2.7. Sampling: A stratified approach: cities, age, education, partnership and gender

As defined above, the aim was not to attain a representative sample, even within the bar and café milieu. Nevertheless, the goal of reaching a high degree of diversity within the sample seems useful. For this, a flexible stratification for the sampling of interview partners seems to be an appropriate tool.⁶⁴ This stratification will reflect expected and possible differences in viewing partnerships and their recognition. The stratification guidelines also serve as a sampling tool in the bar situation itself, i.e. in deciding upon whom to approach out of those who are in the bar.

Age and partnership situations seem to be most important factors for viewing the role of recognition. The question of whether a person has a long-term partner or not has an obvious influence on discourses of recognition, since for single people, the question of partnership recognition will be an abstract one, referring to hypothetical situations or past experiences of partnership. Age refers to both life cycles (partnership can play a different role in a certain period of one's life) and to generational differences (where socio-historical experiences could

respondent. See e.g. the example given *ibid*: 121ff

⁶³ In two cases, Michele and Raffaele and Marianna and Luisa, partners were interviewed jointly. Interviews held with more than one person who are not partners pose very different methodological concerns.

⁶⁴ I am grateful to Professor Pier Paolo Giglioli for his suggestions and help in developing this aspect of the project.

imply important differences in evaluating legal, political and social achievements in the acceptance of homosexuality). In other words, a 50 year-old will have different views compared to a 20 year-old both because s/he has experienced different social norms, having grown up in the 60s and 70s, and also because s/he will have had more experience of relationships, therefore interpreting prospects differently and with reference to this experience. As will be seen, an analysis on the basis of age will gradually be introduced, particularly where the question of social change and generations is concerned – this will be relevant at different points in chapter 4, but most systematically only towards the end of the analysis in chapter 6 on social change.

Cities and gender are another analytical distinction for examining differences in discourses: indeed both country-differences and gender are often seen as fundamental determinants in this respect. As we have outlined so far, and as the following will show, both aspects have been less structurally central to the analysis than they could have been in another approach, e.g. in a systematic comparative approach concerning the cities, or in a gender theory approach, concerning gender or gay/lesbian differences. Despite these explicit limitations of this study, it seemed important to include a balance for these two criteria. Due to the limited size of the sample, a gender balanced strategy was pursued.

Finally, class, education and social status are traditionally central criteria for any sociological study. These are here not explicitly the subject of analysis here but should not be left out as factors in the constitution of the sample. For this purpose, educational background was included in the stratification. In conclusion, the resulting scheme counts the variables of city, age, partnership situation and education. This schema is superimposed with a gender-balanced approach. Accordingly, for any three other criteria being equal both one man and one woman are aimed to be interviewed.⁶⁵ Another interesting criterion, religion, instead, was not included in the stratified sampling strategy.⁶⁶

The stratification shows age as split into under 35 and over 35, partly reflecting the relatively young demographic of the bar and café scene overall. Partnership status is divided into two categories: relationships longer than six months, as one, and any shorter or no relationship, as the other category. Furthermore, the sample is stratified by city and educational level, the latter

⁶⁵ Indicated by F and M in the table below, for one respondent in each box to be either male or female.

⁶⁶ Stratification along those lines would have been complex for the four cities. Respondents were however asked about their religious belief in the personal details at the end of the interview.

being divided into those holding a university or similar degree and those who do not. Studies, when unfinished, will be classified according to the expected or planned level of education.

In sum, the grid then comprises 32 fields, aimed to be filled with at least one respondent each, as the following tables show:

a) Initial stratification grid:

Age, Partnership		City, Education	Paris		London		Berlin		Rome	
			Graduate	Non-Gr.	Grad.	Non-Gr.	Graduate	Non-Gr.	Graduate	Non-G
<35	Single/short term		F	M	M	F	M	F	F	M
	Long term partner		M	F	F	M	F	M	M	F
>35	Single/short term		M	F	F	M	F	M	M	F
	Long term partner		F	M	M	F	M	F	F	M

b) Interview respondents overall (those in grey fit the initial grid according to gender, those haded in light grey differ from the initial gender grid):

London		Berlin		Rome	
Graduate	Non-Gr.	Graduate	Non-Gr.	Graduate	Non-Gr.
M	M	MF	F	MMM	MM
M				FF	MF
M	MMM	M	MF	F	F
FFF	F	M	FFM	F	MMM

The proposed grid reflects the desired diversity in the sampling of interview partners. It is seen as a guide to register a certain control of diversity, but not as a grid where every field needed to be filled at all costs. Gender, and to a lesser extent age, can be easily aimed at in the process of approaching interviewees. But for the other variables, the sampling strategy puts limitations on picking specific respondents. It was considered potentially problematic to ask for criteria of this kind before the interview; age, partnership status and education were only asked for in the interview situation itself. Instead it was seen as foremost important that people who "happened to be there" were approached rather than to fill the boxes of the grid. As can be seen in the table above, the stratification scheme led to an approximate diversification. Some boxes are filled by more than one respondent, the precise gender-scheme has not coherently been applied, and least desirably, some boxes have remained empty. Some of these approximations are arbitrary, while others appear as a trend that may reflect the composition of people in the bars. The clearest observation seems intuitively connected to the composition of the bar population on the whole: the empty fields are all four concerning young respondents in long-term partnership. Furthermore, as the table shows, single men are more numerous than men in long-term relationships, and the opposite is true for women. Thus, the grid served as a flexible guideline, but is equally useful for an *a posteriori* review of the sample.

2.2.8. Accessing the field

A first concern for the access within the field is the choice of bars. It is difficult to systematise or randomise the selection of bars. Listings such as in magazines or lesbian and gay city guides are often incomplete or out of date. Some places are less frequented than others. The choice of bars as a result was based on a selection of different types of bars. In this sense, it was not a selection based on convenience. A variety of locations reflects different age range or different kinds of demographic. A subsequent analysis on the frequentation of the bars will however be important in situating the results of the study, as will the differences between the bar milieus in the respective cities, for example the London pub-culture or the Parisian café culture. This equally applies to choices such as the time of the day, which were made in a flexible way in order to contact respondents at busy periods to get a sample of the location's customers.

The first series of interviews took place in Berlin in August 2003, the second in Paris between December 2003 and February 2004. The fieldwork in Rome was undertaken between May

2004 and May 2005, the interviews in London were completed between December 2004 and March 2005. Two additional interviews were conducted in Berlin in July 2006.⁶⁷ The aim of diversifying the sample requires the researcher also to diversify the locations of access, and here bars and cafés listed in various lesbian and gay magazines were taken into account.

In Berlin, these are spread around the city with certain lesbian and gay locations clustered in the area around Nollendorfplatz (Schöneberg), Gleimstraße (Prenzlauer Berg), Oranienstraße and Mehringdamm (Kreuzberg).

In Paris, on the contrary, most lesbian and gay bars and cafés are clustered around the Marais quarter, in the 4th arrondissement around Rue Sainte Croix de la Bretonnerie, but also in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd arrondissements, all frequented by people from various areas in the city and from the suburbs, as well as by visitors to the city.

In Rome, defining a diversity of bars was more difficult than in Berlin and Paris, as the 'early evening bar' is itself a recent and rare phenomenon to the Roman lesbian and gay scene. Bars in general are frequented only in late evenings. The criteria for selecting the bars therefore needed to be adapted and included bars in the Colosseo area, Trastevere, and Ostiense, as well as the summer open air location "Gay Village" where stands of various bars and clubs are held during the summer months. The gay beach in Ostia, a main gay and lesbian location during the summer months located around a gay and lesbian beach bar, was equally used for this sample.

In London, on the contrary, the number of possible bars, pubs and cafés is vast and only a small proportion can be included. Soho in London's West End, with its largest cluster of gay and lesbian commercial locations was placed at the centre of the selection, with some bars on the fringes of Soho and one pub in Camden being included.

In conclusion, the fieldwork counts a fair range of different types of bars representative of a variety of styles and types of customers within the metropolitan gay and lesbian culture,

⁶⁷ These final two interviews were more specifically structured around the question of East-West differences in the city, see: Frédéric Jörgens, "East Berlin: Lesbian and Gay Narratives on Everyday Life, Social Acceptance, and Past and Present" in Roman Kuhar and Judit Takacs, *Everyday life of GLBT in Eastern and Central Europe* (Ljubljana: Peace Institute Editions, 2006)

without exhaustively including all suitable ones.⁶⁸ More details on the bar selection are provided in the appendix.

2.2.9. Approaching individual respondents

As *systematized* random sampling was not adopted, we have to raise the question as to what extent in the moment of selection, the researcher may introduce an implicit selection. The stratification guide served as a tool here, deciding before entering the bar what age group, whether male or female, whether expected to be in a relationship or not, should be looked for. In addition, in order to avoid an unconscious sampling bias, the accessibility within the location and the size of the group of people were important criteria for approaching individuals. Accessibility here means, for example, that the researcher would not have climbed over two tables clumsily in order to approach a couple engaged in a heavy argument. Small groups of people (often two – who could be either friends or a couple) were preferably approached: the presence of more than one person successfully helped to avoid any unease about being approached by a researcher.

When a group of two or more people was approached, I generally attempted to interview all members of the group. This seemed important because the systematic selection of the one person within the group who showed the most interest in responding would possibly reduce diversity. Taking only the one person who is less interested instead proves difficult practically. In this sense, a particular effort was made throughout to convince also the less interested persons to take part in the study, even though this sometimes failed.

After explaining the research project and the way the interview would be conducted, subsequent appointments were either arranged directly or fixed later by telephone; only in one occasion was the interview held immediately after first contact. The people who were approached were overall friendly and forthcoming in participating in the study – even when no particular interest on the topic was articulated. While the interviewees were told that thirty minutes were sufficient for an interview, most of them subsequently had an hour or even more

⁶⁸ In the following, the bars and number of respondents are briefly stated. London: "The Village" (2), the "G.A.Y bar" (3), the "First Out" (3), "Rupert Street" (1), "Bar Code" (1), "Compton's" (1), "Admiral Duncan" (0), "Black Cap" (1). Paris: "Les Scandaleuses" (2), "Bliss" (1), "Le Tropic" (1), "Open Café" (1), "Cox" (1), "Duplex" (2), "Okawa" (1), "La Petite Vertue" (1), "Utopia" (0). Berlin: "Schall und Rauch" (2), "Amsterdam" (2), "Bierhimmel" (2), "Stiller Don" (3), "Heile Welt" (1), "Cafe Sundström" (1). Rome: "Coming Out" (7)

to elaborate on the questions developed in the discussions. Women were in general more interested in participating in the study and never displayed an attitude of distrust or the slight ironic mockery concerning "sociology" (and the idea that "interviewing" could have been a "pretext") that in some occasions arose with a number of male respondents on the first contact. This could be interpreted with a gender specific interest in political topics, which would however extend beyond the scope of the analysis at this point. It can be noted that women, more than men in the sample, very consistently identified as left-wing, with only very few voicing disinterest for Politics (see later discussion below).

2.2.10. Difficulties in the recruitment process

In groups of two, one of the two refused the participation in five cases, mostly reinforced by the other one who was instead willing to participate. ("He really does not have much time at the moment and does not want to respond, but I could maybe do it."; "She is not lesbian, but I am interested in the topic."; "I am much more into these political debates, so if you want I could participate if he is not that interested."⁶⁹) Even though every attempt was made to push for participation also in these cases, it did not always succeed. However, in the majority of cases, all the people approached accepted. In one case in Paris ("Open Café"), a couple that had just got together did agree to participate but after several attempts failed to fix an appointment over the phone, the contact was eventually considered lost. In two cases in Paris, the women approached did not live in Paris and interviewing proved to be impossible. In one case in Rome, two men who were approached in the bar with a group of lesbian girls stated they were not gay and therefore would not participate, even though this could probably be read as a disinterest in participating in the project. Overall, the response could hardly have been expected to be better and the access strategy was largely successful.

In one case, a problem was encountered where the entry to a lesbian bar was forbidden to male visitors without female company. After explaining my purpose to the barwoman I was still refused entry. It was a mostly rather empty bar ("Utopia"), and no further attempt was made to include the bar again (for example in the company of a girl who could have facilitated the access).

"Circolo degli Artisti" (1) "Bocca di Baco" (1), "Gay village" (4), "Settimo Cielo", Ostia beach (1). Those figuring with a zero-count refer to occasions where the fieldwork failed to produce an interview.

⁶⁹ These examples are rephrased freely.

In Rome and London, compared to Berlin and Paris, minor difficulties occurred in persuading people to participate or in the scheduling of a meeting. As a result, at the final phase of interviewing, a financial compensation for participation in the interview was offered to see if this improved the response rate (£10 in London and 10€ in Rome). As the figures above show, this did not necessarily reduce the refusal rate which had been very low to start with. However, a very clear consequence was a more deliberate and faster arrangement of appointments.

In summary, the response to the request for participation in the study was positive. Outspoken rejection to participate was the exception, occurring only once. Most recurrent rejections were out of larger groups of friends where not all could be convinced to participate as soon as one or two "volunteers" had been identified within the group. This situation, which arose in some larger groups that were approached at the beginning of the fieldwork was subsequently avoided by focusing on smaller groups within the bars. However, in Rome in particular, groups of people in the bars were mostly larger, often composed of five to ten people. In the figure below, this is listed under "let their friends do it". This also explains why several interviews in Rome were held with more than one respondent at a time; consequently, in order to diversify the sample further, an overall higher number of respondents were taken into account in Rome.

	Accepted	Tourists etc.	Inconclusive	Let their friends do it	Rejected
Berlin	11	0	0	5	0
Paris	10	2	3	0	0
Rome	14	1	0	8	2
London	12	2	2	3	0

The contact was inconclusive either when those contacted were visitors to the city and interviews therefore impossible to arrange, or when the person proved to be extremely busy and after several attempts at fixing an appointment for an interview completely failed. But as the figures show, these were exceptions to the rule.

Once the interviews were arranged, the respondents were generally very generous with the time they gave to it. Also, none of the interviews found questions too personal to respond, except for a question concerning the numbers of sexual partners which was left unanswered on a few occasions. Furthermore, only one respondent refused the recording of the interview. In this case, the respondent referred to his employer in the military weapons industry as a reason, who had incited him to extreme caution over any recording. Extracts in this case are based on notes.

In conclusion, the fieldwork was very successful when measured against the initial expectations and fulfilled the needs of the aims of the research.

BERLIN INTERVIEWS

	Graduates		Non-graduates	
	in relationship > 6 months	single or < 6 months	in relationship > 6 months	single or < 6 months
< 35		M: Daniel, 25 F: Katharina ¹ , 22 M: Andreas ³ , 28		F: Jenny ¹ , 20
> 35	M: Sven, 39	M: Thorsten ³ , 71	F: Simone, 43 F: Nadine, 41 F: Monika ² , 38 (M: Gloria*, 37)	M: Hans, 47 F: Petra ² , 42

Notes:

- 1) interviewed jointly
- 2) interviewed jointly
- 3) interviewed in 2006 with a thematic focus on East-West differences
- 4) interviewed in 2006 with a thematic focus on East-West differences
- *) snowball system instead of bar approach, name unchanged

PARIS INTERVIEWS

	Graduates		Non-graduates	
	in relationship > 6 months	single or < 6 months	in relationship > 6 months	single or < 6 months
< 35		F: Dorothée, 26 M: Jérémy, 30	F: Léa, 30	M: Julien, 29 (n)
> 35	F: Nicole, 54	M: Christophe, 39 M: Jacques, 55	F: Fabienne, 55	M: Antoine, 50 M : Olivier, 39

Additionally done:

- Focus group with five from youth group MAG
- Interview with Philippe Lasnier, June 2004, responsible for questions relating to the “homosexual community” at the Paris City Hall (“chargé de mission au cabinet du maire de Paris pour les « relations avec la communauté homosexuelle”)
- Previously done (2000): Interview with Partick Bloche
- Interview with two youth group representatives
- Previously done: Interview with a ‘paced’ couple (2000)

Notes:

n) notes instead of tape

ROME INTERVIEWS

	Graduates		Non-graduates	
	in relationship > 6 months	single or < 6 months	in relationship > 6 months	single or < 6 months
< 35	F: Antonella, 24 F: Marianna ⁶ , 27	M: Mario, 25 M: Dario, 23 M: Angelo ³ , 29	M: Raffaele, 26 F: Luisa ⁶ , 29	M: Carlo ³ , 34 F: Elena, 31 F: Claudia ⁶ , 33
> 35	F: Gabriella, 39	F: Patti, 38	M: Michele ⁴ , 50 (*M: Stefano ⁵ , 38) (*M: Riccardo ⁵ , 42)	F: Bianca, 43

Notes:

- 3) Interviewed jointly
- 4) Interviewed jointly
- 5) Interviewed jointly
- 6) Interviewed jointly
- *) Snowball instead of bar approach

LONDON INTERVIEWS

	Graduates		Non-graduates	
	in relationship > 6 months	single	in relationship > 6 months	single
< 35	M: Matthew, 29 M: Kevin, 32	M: Miguel, 21		M: Owen, 26
> 35	F: Anne, 35 F: Harriet, 35 F: Gemma, 39	M: Jason, 47	F: Julia, 36	M: Lasse, 37 M: Gareth, 45 M: Mark, 40

Additionally done:

- Alan Duncan, MP (conservative shadow minister for transport and energy)

2.3. Interview practice

In the following section, the fieldwork will be reviewed from the point of view of the interview practice. The aim is to provide a retrospective critique of methodological and practical questions in order to position findings better in relation to the research aims. The analysis of discourses will thus be situated against the interviewing process and the role of the interviewer will be reviewed. The interview situation is considered as an interactive production of discourse. Some examples will be given, whereby difficulties and problems will be assessed critically.

2.3.1. The researcher's role in the interview situation

As outlined above, the questionnaire guide was not used as a rigid grid. It was hoped that most themes implied in the questions would be touched upon without posing targeted questions. This expectation was largely satisfied. However, slight adjustments in the preparation of the interviews and in their structure were made in order to improve the results. For example, in a second phase, it was explained more explicitly to the respondent, before starting the interview, that the idea of the interview was to serve as a trigger for the respondent's own narrative, as opposed to being a set of questions to be answered in a clear-cut manner.

In the interviews, the questionnaire guide worked reasonably well. One should add that respondents were generally talkative and easily responded in depth to both personal and political questions. Some exceptions to this included a reluctance to talk about present or recent relationships, such as in Daniel's case. Daniel, a respondent in Berlin, talked very extensively about political aspects of recognition debate; on personal issues however, he showed some resistance, and this aspect was then dropped:

Daniel (Berlin, 25)

FJ: In the next part I would like to ask some questions concerning yourself, so to speak.

D: Now it's getting difficult. Yes. [laughs briefly]

FJ: Oh well if you don't want to...

D: Yes.

FJ: ... then you just say so. Are you in a relationship?

D: No.

FJ: No. Have you had other relationships before?

D: Yes, err, there was something that lasted for a bit, I mean, longer than a year, or half a year.

FJ: That was a long time ago, or..



D: No, not quite, not really, but that's why I don't want to talk about it. [laughs]⁷⁰

In this case only, the non-willingness to relate to his personal life persisted throughout the interview, as is illustrated by a question about 'promiscuity' towards the end of the interview:

Daniel (Berlin, 25)

FJ: In the past two months, had you had one, two, three, or more than three sexual partners?

S: No, don't want to answer that one. [laughs briefly]⁷¹

In considering the interviewer's introduction to the topic of his personal life ("Oh well if you don't want to..."), which appears to be slightly clumsy, one should add that in most other cases respondents seemed not only willing to talk about their private lives, but indeed enjoyed talking about it. In many cases, mentioning that somewhat intrusive questions could be left out seemed at odds with the confidential nature the interview had, by then, already taken, as we see in the interview with Nadine:

Nadine (Berlin, 41)

FJ: So, when questions are unpleasant for you, you don't have to answer, just let me know.

N: Yes. [laughs] In fact I have already told you quite a lot.⁷²

In Daniel's case, after insisting slightly, the refusal was accepted and personal questions of partnership were approached on a more abstract level, i.e. in general life plans and ideals of how a couple should be defined, as in the following passage:

Daniel (Berlin, 25)

That's why I'm a bit of an exception, because I always tell myself, it's about monogamy really – and that's why you can't have more [than one] partnership, registered partnerships I mean, and then, when you are working towards that, or when it really becomes a question, that you also move together, you know, that's like the first step, to move together as partners. And then sometime you will have things in common, a common bank account, the same name,

⁷⁰ Interview with Daniel, Berlin, 8/08/2003. Approached at Café "Stiller Don", interview at Café "Gupis". Original: "FJ: Im nächsten Teil würd ich dir gern n paar Fragen zu dir selbst quasi stellen...

D: Jetzt wird's schwierig, ja [lacht kurz].

FJ: Also, wenn du jetzt irgendwo keinen Bock drauf hast...

D: Ja.

FJ: ...dann sagst du das halt. Bist du in einer Beziehung?

D: Nein.

FJ: Nein. – Hattest du vorher andere Beziehungen?

D: Ehm, ja. Aber darüber möchte ich nicht reden [lacht]

FJ: Ok. Vielleicht einfach, war das ne längere Beziehung?

D: Ja, ja, war was, mmh, n bisschen längeres. Also ich meine länger so als ein, länger als n Jahr oder n halbes Jahr. ...

FJ: Das liegt schon lange zurück, oder...?

D: Nee, noch nicht, noch nicht richtig, aber deswegen will ich darüber nicht reden. [lacht]

⁷¹ Original: "FJ: In den letzten zwei Monaten, hattest du da einen, zwei, drei oder mehrere Sexualpartner?

D: Nee, die will ich nicht beantworten [lacht kurz]"

⁷² Original: "FJ: Mm. Also, wenn, wenn dir Fragen unangenehm sind, musst du da nicht drauf antworten, da sagst du mir einfach - bescheid. - N: Ja. [lacht] Ich hab dir ja jetzt schon viel erzählt im Grunde genommen."

that's something that many don't consider really. But I do have that in mind. Yes, so much on that.⁷³

In some other, but still only a few, cases, the interview situation made respondents refrain from pronouncing names of partners or places, such as where the partner lives, such as here in Antoine's case:

Antoine (Paris, 50)

A: But it's the first time that I travel so little. In previous years I sometimes went there five times.

FJ: Where is it?

A: Very, very far away.

FJ: Very, very far away. [laughs]

A: Yes. Very, very far away. [laughs]⁷⁴

In this case, Antoine is not willing to say the name of the country where his partner lives, in order to talk only generally about his own personal life.⁷⁵ The lack of the information about the place of residence of the partner is not of major importance here. However, the passage points to the fact that the results of the interview reflect certain choices about what information concerning one's private life could appropriately be disclosed to the interviewer, as is sometimes, but more rarely so, explicitly pointed out:

Dorothée (Paris, 26)

I won't tell you the name, but ok, I can, because if afterwards you [change the names]⁷⁶

As a researcher, both the judgement about the truth and informative value of the interview and the awareness of the discourse as situated in a particular interview situation are necessary assessments in the analysis of the findings. As regards the first point, a preliminary impression is that all questions were generally answered very openly and with a high level of trust towards the interviewer concerning the discussion of personal matters. However there is a certain irony involved in the question of presenting a story to the interviewer precisely about the question over to whom and in what kind of a situation one's personal life and intimacy should be displayed. Such a question will be addressed in further depth in chapter 5, where privacy or openness e.g. at work will be analyzed. In this example, when a respondent says to

⁷³ Original: "Deswegen bin ich son bisschen bin ich da so die Ausnahme, weil ich sach mir immer schon, auch wenn man, weil es ist ja ne Monogamie, du kannst ja nich mehrere Partnerschaften haben, also eingetragene Partnerschaften, und dann, wenn du darauf hinausarbeitest, oder wenn das wirklich irgendwann mal in Frage kommt, dass du dann auch zusammenziehst, ne, das ist so der erste Schritt, als Partnerschaft zusammenziehst, und dann hast du irgendwann mal was Gemeinsames, gemeinsames Konto und gemeinsamen Namen hast, ähm, dann ist das was, ähm, - was viele nicht, nicht so daran denken, aber was ich dann schon, irgendwo so im Auge hab. - Ja, das dazu. -"

⁷⁴ Original: "Mais c'est la première fois où je voyage si peu. Les autres années, je passais cinq fois par an là-bas. FJ : C'est où ? - A: Très très loin. - FJ : Très très loin. [rire] - A: Ouais. - - Très très loin. [rire]"

⁷⁵ This analysis is supported by various instances of this kind throughout the interview.

the interviewer that he would not talk about his homosexuality at work, it is obvious that the discussion with the researcher is considered to be in some fundamental way detached from his working environment: 1) The respondent's judgment of the interview situation is influenced by various factors, one of which is the anonymous nature of the interview and its confidential use within university research, 2) the image which the interviewee has of the interviewer, where the impression was that there was in most cases a dialogue similar to one with a good friend, 3) the setting of the interviews in lesbian or gay cafés (in most cases) and thus its classification as an "inner-community" discourse. A certain discourse is related to a certain environment and an assessment of the situation's social context. It appeared that talking openly and generally audibly in the café even about very intimate questions was never an issue of concern to the respondents.

2.3.2. Respondents' omissions

In her doctoral thesis on same-sex marriages, Kathleen Hull explains an accidental meeting with one of her interviewees that evolves into interesting observations about the previously collected material.⁷⁷ Kathleen sees Brenda again, who had been 'married' to Kim in a private church ceremony. And as it turns out, their partnership had been on the verge of a break-up already at the time of the interview, in which no conflict whatsoever had been mentioned, even though the partners were interviewed separately. Interviewing Brenda again, an 'extra-marital' affair two years before the initial interview had (according to Brenda in the second interview) been at the core of the break-up. In analysing this new finding, Kathleen Hull points to the choice of a particular discourse by the participants:

They may have been influenced by the 'model minority effect' (see Carrington 1999, 178) wanting to portray themselves as happy, stable, and fully committed, thereby demonstrating the possibilities for same-sex couples generally. [...] I think their omissions calls attention to the limits of in-depth interviewing as a research technique and to the need to interpret the content of these interviews with caution. Undoubtedly other interview participants also withheld similarly significant information about the past or present of their relationships. [...] it underlines the importance of treating interview data as moments of discursive production rather than as straightforward reports about "reality".⁷⁸

The significant omissions concerning the perspectives and difficulties which the couple experiences surely affect what we can learn about the "reality" of that couple. But if the focus

⁷⁶ Original: "Je te dis pas le nom, mais bon, je peux, parce que si après si tu [...]"

⁷⁷ Kathleen Elizabeth Hull. *Wedding Rites/ Marriage Rights: The Cultural Politics of Same-Sex couples*. (PhD dissertation in Sociology. Evanstone, Illinois, June 2001)

⁷⁸ Ibid: 267f.

is on discursive production, it is the conditions of production that should be of major interest. To be sure, focusing a study on marriage ceremonies, in Kathleen Hull's case, will by itself produce a certain discourse that it expected to be one of a happily loving couple, independent of the minority effect Hull is referring to. The fact that they know that the other partner is also being interviewed, albeit separately, constitutes another factor. As a reason why conjugal conflicts had not been mentioned to the researcher, Brenda "simply replied that it was something she did not talk about with anybody."⁷⁹ An important question in situating the discourse would be whether indeed the discourse was one similar to those produced with friends etc., or whether instead it was strongly influenced by the desire to show the couple in a positive light – an effect that is nearly always inherent to "wedding-talk".

In the interviews conducted for this study, the diversity of the most personal and intimate topics hints at an interview situation that was at least not systematically biased towards certain types of self-presentation, such as being or wishing to be a faithful monogamous partner in a relationship or similar self-descriptions that could claim to be part of a "model-minority" picture. Instead, various different discourses on controversial intimate themes are present; thus the question of faithfulness in the couple can serve as an example here, where all varieties of doing/not doing, telling/not telling are present, including in some cases the disclosure to the interviewer of stories hidden to the long term partner, such as in Gabriella's case (Rome).

Gabriella (Rome, 39)

I think in fact, deep down, I'm not a faithful person. Because I don't believe in being faithful. [...] She does not know it. Because she does not see it the way I do. Oh well.⁸⁰

In one case, where two partners were interviewed separately, one interviewee revealed an affair he had not told his partner about, and that he would do so in the future (see chapter 4). Here, the interviewer appeared in the role of a confidant, as throughout the fifty interviews often seemed the case in the one-hour long face-to-face conversations about very personal topics.

The essential questions for the conditions of discourse production in the interview situation are the gaps between the discourse produced in talking to the researcher and those in other social circumstances such as with friends, family, or between the partners themselves, and that these

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 267.

⁸⁰ Original: "Io penso di fatto, di fondo, io non sono una persona fedele. Perché non credo nella fedeltà. [...] Lei non lo sa. Perché non la pensa come me. Eh, va be'."

gaps are taken into account. Partly, this issue was addressed in the interview itself in asking with whom s/he tends to talk about the issues discussed.

Another central question concerning the conditions of production in the interviews conducted is the socio-political opinion on recognition and marriage. Jacques in Paris for example asked after the interview was formally ended: "But don't you think that the questions you are asking imply a certain response on the matter?"⁸¹ On the spot, the answer was "no, because ..." As a matter of fact, the format of the interview in Jacques' case had allowed for an exploration of his view which - from a conservative position - was rather hostile to same-sex marriage (Jacques' view will be explored in some further depth in chapters 4 and 6). However the question is of course a central one, and on a certain level the answer is yes. In a way, the questions always imply a certain "type" of answer. For instance, the practical legal questions such as buying common property are not pointed out in the questionnaire guide, and the result is that they are hardly talked about. However, some exploration in these areas resulted in a lack of interest on the part of the respondent, particularly singles, but also many respondents in a partnership, who had never looked into these practical applications of partnership rights. However, the interview, as it was conceived, clearly favoured personal narratives on the one hand, and general societal observations on the other.

2.3.3. Further reflections: Glorifying the couple and recognition?

What could be more problematic is the following aspect: Is a study on the recognition of same-sex couples by definition one that looks at the positive sides of recognition, affirmation, the possibility of the public union of a couple etc.? The answer lies on two levels: First, as with the observation on intimate questions (such as fidelity), the responses obtained show a great diversity, notably due to the presence of critical stances to lesbian and gay marriage both in anti-marriage positions and in traditional views of families. Hence, there does not seem to be a systematic bias towards a positive view on the question. Yet again, in individual interviews, the question needs to be born in mind, in particular when specific questions address the social changes which have occurred through recognition. A comparison with other passages throughout the interview can be a useful tool. In the interview with Laurence in Paris, the initial response reflects a consensual view that has often also been adopted by the *Jospin* government (1997-2002) which introduced the *Pacs* reform.

⁸¹ Based on notes after the recording had stopped, interview with Jacques, 55, Paris.

Léa (Paris, 30)

I think that there have been several big steps that have been made. And then they talk about it when before it wasn't talked about. So, err, no, it's good. In my view, things are moving forward, but too slowly.⁸²

However, later on through the interview, she backs this interpretation up with a cynical tone, in a passage cited at the beginning of chapter 1, describing an unspecified political class that treats homosexuals with contempt and false tolerance ("pretend"):

Léa (Paris, 30)

FJ: Have things changed? Do you think that through the legal recognition of gay and lesbian couples something has changed?

L: Err, I think that people pretend to have a certain tolerance. Err, concerning marriage and all that. In fact, it's as if you threw crumbs to a dog, you know. Ok, we'll give them that and they will be happy and then we won't hear anyone talk about them anymore.⁸³

As was accounted for in the initial research design, the interview practice throughout the project was open to revision and improvements, due to smaller problems, errors, discovering fruitful alternative questions, but also due to the absence of some problems that had initially been expected to arise, such as the question of establishing confidence in the interview situation. Further improvements were thus considered, partly tried out, and some were adopted for the further continuation of the project. This strategy was at the outset inseparably linked to the non-comparative rationale at the outset, as the aim was not to construct equal conditions for the interviews in the four different cities. This meant that a richer outcome or different forms of interviewing in the last city where the fieldwork was conducted were not to be considered as resulting from a mistake in the research design, as they would have been in a primarily comparative one. Instead, they were the desired outcome of continuous improvements and exploration. However, the main lines of the questionnaire guide remained the same and the success of the interviews was relatively stable throughout.

⁸² Original: "Je pense qu'il y a déjà eu pas mal de, - des, des, - des grands pas de faits. Et puis ils en parlent, alors qu'avant on n'en parlait pas du tout. Donc, euh, non, c'est bien. C'est, - pour moi, c'est, ça avance, mais trop lentement quoi."

⁸³ Original: "FJ : Est-ce que quelque chose a changé ? Est-ce que tu penses que par la reconnaissance légale des couples gays et lesbiens quelque chose a changé ? - L : Euh, - je pense que les gens font semblant d'avoir une certaine tolérance. - Euh, vis-à-vis -du mariage et tout ça, en fait, c'est comme si tu jetais des miettes à un chien quoi. Ils, bon, on va leur donner ça, comme ça il seront content. Et puis, euh, - et puis on n'entendra plus parler d'eux."

2.3.4. Further problems, errors, changes

The fact that in the vast majority of interviews, personal stories, relationship history and the like were addressed with great openness towards the interviewer led to a shift in the interview structure: after approximately 20 interviews which had begun with the solicitation on an abstract political level of opinions on legal recognition, the subsequent interviews in the respective languages, were opened with a personal biographical question, before moving to socio-political and legal discourses:

“Can you briefly tell me about yourself? Where you were born, where you live, what you do, whether you are in a relationship ... ?”

The main advantage of this opening is that the respondent feels less obliged to deliver what she thinks should be the “right answer” rather than her own ideas. The latter indeed occurred to some degree in the normative political questions which some had difficulties in responding to. The initial idea, instead, had been that personal life would be a more sensitive topic.

A frequent problem that occurred in the interview process was that of the active intervention in, and insistence on, certain topics. This problem becomes important when it becomes apparent that the initial narrative in the response has been substantially influenced by how the interviewer’s question is interpreted by the respondent, and accordingly other possible narrative routes that could give a different perspective remain unexplored. An example of this is the interview with Christophe, whom we will encounter again in a longer review in chapter 3. A past relationship is given as a relevant experience to the theme of the interview, while the present relationship, where the degree of commitment is unclear, remains touched upon only in a peripheral way; this results in it being disregarded when talking about “relationships”:

Christophe (Paris, 39)

C: This person means a lot to me, but I'm not sure about it really, and I don't know, well, I think, today it's been four months that we know each other. I don't really know what he thinks of our relationship, you know. Well, yes, I do know but we are not in the same frame of mind really.

FJ: Mm.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Expressions such as these are generally cut out of the presentation throughout the thesis, unless the encouragement by the interviewer seems of potential importance in the passage that is cited. Here of course it is fully shown as the interaction within the interview situation is looked at. Concerning the presentation of the interviews, language has generally been smoothened as necessary to improve a better understanding of the quotes. Quoting the respondents word by word (as they are in the full transcripts) was additionally flawed by the need for translations that would not have grasped nuances and mistakes in any useful way.

C: So that's it, and so that bothers me. And so, as I talk about it to my friends because they are there for that. So, [laughs] so it bothers them and they tell me that I have to do something, that I get on with my life and that I stop, you know. So, err...

FJ: Yes.

C: ... now, from there to imagine how I can live these things, err, to live my life, well, no, they [my friends] think, because they see that this relationship is causing me pain, so they think that, err, I have to get over with it. But well, err, I am a fighter, I'm patient, so, err, that's it. According to them I'm wrong.

FJ: Mm.

C: Perhaps they are right, you know. Surely they are right, but I have to realize it by myself, you know. [laughs]

FJ: Mm.

C: Well it's true that perhaps in some months time I will tell them: you were right. But well, for the moment, yeah. And it's true that these people are important because they are my best friends, and I hear what they say. And, well, it's difficult to apply what they are telling me, that's clear, you know.

FJ: Yeah.

C: This person means a lot to me.

FJ: *Err, - and, err, - your family or your colleagues perhaps?*

C: No. - My family does not know. My colleagues don't know.⁸⁵

What can be seen here is that, while Christophe is encouraged to go on speaking, by the rephrasing of what he said and subsequently with an affirmative "mm", it does not succeed in making him actually talk about what is or is not going on with the person he has been seeing for four months, and what the precise points of conflicts are between their different "frames of mind" ("états d'esprit"). The chance to explore this further is missed and the next topic, family and colleagues, is instead brought up by the interviewer. On the one hand, many narratives are bound to remain unexplored because of the time constraints in the interview and sometimes in

⁸⁵ Original: "C: Cette personne-là compte beaucoup pur moi, mais je ne sais pas si elle compte, et je pense pas, enfin, je pense, - enfin - aujourd'hui je, ça fait, bon, ça fait, - quatre mois qu'on se connaît, euh, je sais pas ce qu'il pense vraiment de notre relation quoi. Enfin si je sais mais, mais on n'est pas sur la même, le même état d'esprit quoi.

FJ : Mm.

C: Donc voilà, et donc ça me prend la tête quoi. Et donc comme j'en parle à mes amis parce qu'ils sont là pour ça, donc, euh, [rire], donc ça leur prend la tête et ils me disent il faut que je fasse quelque chose, que j'avance par moi-même et que j'arrête quoi. Donc, euh, ...

FJ : Ouais.

C: ... maintenant, de là à imaginer comment je peux vivre les choses, euh, - de vivre ma vie, enfin non, ils se disent, parce qu'ils voient que cette relation me fait du mal donc ils se disent que, euh, il faut que je pense à passer à autre chose, mais bon, euh, - je suis un combattant, quelqu'un de patient, donc, euh, voilà. D'après eux j'ai tort.

FJ : Mm.

C: Ils ont peut-être raison hein. Ils ont certainement raison, mais il faut que je m'en rende compte par moi-même quoi. [rire]

FJ : Mm.

C: Bon, c'est vrai que peut-être dans quelques mois je leur dirai vous avez eu raison. Mais bon pour le moment donc voilà, et, et c'est vrai que ces gens-là sont importants parce que c'est mes meilleurs amis, - euh, ils sont importants et j'entends ce qu'ils me disent. Et bon j'ai du mal à, - à appliquer ce qu'ils me disent, ça c'est clair quoi.

FJ : Ouais.

C: Parce que là ce personnage est à voir comme une personne très importante quoi. -

FJ : Euh, - *et, euh, - ta famille ou tes collègues éventuellement ?*

C: Non. - Ma famille n'est pas au courant, mes collègues ne sont pas au courant."

order to respect the respondent's wish to disclose or not to disclose certain aspects of his or her intimate life. On the other hand, Christophe's story hints at the fact that some intimate stories seem to the respondents to be worthy of being told in the context of the recognition of same-sex couples, be they in the past or hypothetical, while others, which are often ambiguous or unclear, are seen as irrelevant to the question posed. Therefore it is to be assumed that in certain cases, the interview itself might stimulate the line of thought that "it would be nice to live in a committed partnership after all"; "get on with my life" ("passer à autre chose"), as Christophe says, seems to be meant in this way.

In various cases, however, alternatives to the idealization of a committed couple were given, either out of a normative choice or due to the absence of "committed couple" experiences in the biographical discourse, such as in Jacques' case. He refers to a story with an American man as a "casual" relationship ("every now and then"/"de temps en temps").

Jacques (Paris, 55)

FJ: For example, [has there been] maybe a long relationship that you could perhaps give me as an example?

J: No, I, that's to say, err, well, the -. I met a, - an American who was passing through Paris. And, well, so, well, he was in New York, and I was here. Every now and then he came to France, every now and then I went to see him, during the holidays and all of that. Well, it lasted, err, well, for three years.⁸⁶

While for Jacques, there seems to be a certain resignation to the circumstances of the absence of a partnership, without fully valuing this as a positive course of events, in Antoine's case, also in Paris, the couple is clearly presented as something negatively connoted, at least according to his observations:

Antoine (Paris, 50)

A: Couple relations, their mode of communication, it doesn't interest me. I don't think it makes the one or the other better. I think that on the contrary, it almost restricts [you].

FJ: Mm.

A: It doesn't interest me.⁸⁷

These examples can serve as a further indication that the conditions for the production of discourses in the interview situation were not all in all restrictive, at least not to the extent that

⁸⁶ Original: "FJ: Par exemple, [y avait-il] peut-être une relation longue, - que tu pourrais me donner comme exemple ? - J: Non, c'est-à-dire, eh, bon, le, - - j'ai connu un, un, - un - Américain qui était de passage à Paris. Et, - bon alors, bon, ben lui il était à New York, moi j'étais ici, - de temps en temps il venait en France, moi de temps en temps j'allais lui rendre visite, aux vacances et tout ça. Bon, ça a duré, eh, - bon, - trois ans."

⁸⁷ Original: "A: Le rapport de couple, leur mode de communication - ne m'intéressent pas. Je trouve pas que ça rende l'un ou l'autre meilleur, je trouve que ça, au contraire, à la limite ça limite. - FJ: Mm. - A: Ça ça m'intéresse pas."

alternative discourses were precluded, and that the format of the research would have unavoidably led to a "glorification" of the presumed standard couple.

2.3.5. *Use of pictures*

In the questionnaire guide, towards the end of the interviews, pictures were used in order to stimulate narratives on the couple and the family and on representations of homosexuality (see appendix II). This passage also serves to re-launch certain themes. Overall, this proved to be successful in many cases. However, as it was time consuming, it was left out in those cases where respondents were not clearly willing to commit themselves to a long interview or where the discussion up to this part seemed overly exhaustive. A second concern could be that the discourses based on the pictures cannot easily be integrated with the other material. An example of this is Dorothée's reaction to a picture that shows a young and beautiful girl and young man in a relaxed siesta pose, taken from a perfume advertisement. It was the only one of the pictures that was positively judged throughout. Her comment hints at the greater happiness she could have, at least more easily, if she was heterosexual:

Dorothée (Paris, 26)

[young heterosexual couple, advertisement picture]

Well, there, yes, that's nice. They are young. It's clear that it would be much easier to be like that, but well, unfortunately it's not like that. So, err, [laughs].⁸⁸

This comment should be seen in the light of the picture shown. While this is the case also with spoken input to the discussion, the pictures might produce more subconscious, or more immediate, reactions. In the context of this study however, the rationale should only be to look at the comments on the pictures as to their capability of triggering relevant discourses. In the following two cases, the different levels of the comments on pictures are worth pointing out, referring to the immediate sentimental impression ("very harmonious", "nice"/"sehr harmonisch", "schön"), and the relation of the respondent to them: Sven distances himself from the represented scene of promiscuity, thus referring to different levels of engagement with the picture. In Hans' case below, where he is commenting on a picture depicting homosexual couples fostering children, his analysis is on an abstract social level, where he reflects on the social effect of the existence of these kind of pictures:

Sven (Berlin, 39)

[picture: several naked men and women in an sensual pose on a bed]

⁸⁸ Original: "Bon, là, si, ça c'est sympa, celle-ci elle est sympa. C'est des jeunes. C'est sûr que ce serait beaucoup plus simple d'être comme ça, mais bon, malheureusement c'est pas comme ça, donc, eh, [rire]."

Wilhelm: Principally it is a very harmonious picture. Even if I have to say, well, it's a matter of taste, despite any openness. I am rather a person who, particularly concerning the body and sexuality, focuses on one person. But it does not need to, err, this picture does not necessarily say that they had group sex before or after, but just that they are somehow being sensual with one another, but it is always interesting, what ideas develop in your mind just then, I mean in me now, because of such a picture. I would not really be able to see myself in that role.⁸⁹

Hans (Berlin, 47)

[picture: two women with baby]

Yes, that's nice. I would have liked to live my childhood like this, that such pictures just exist, and show the most diverse things that are possible. But I still enjoyed being an outsider. [...]

[picture: gay and lesbian parents with pram; USA]

Fat men with fat children. [laughs]⁹⁰

Overall, the idea of including pictures proved to be helpful in some cases, while it remained a minor tool in stimulating narratives. In another context however (in chapter 6), we will discuss the role of images on an abstract level, of which Hans' comments will be a good illustration again.

2.3.6. Terminology and linguistic observations

A deeper linguistic analysis of the interview material was discarded in the initial research design for the study for various reasons. A practical one lies in the use of four different languages. This is also reflected in the transcription techniques, which deliberately pays only minor attention to for example precision in pauses, or superposition of two voices. At the same time however, some aspects of the uses of terminology should be pointed out, where the use of certain words may or may not be linked to the vocabulary used by the interviewer. An example of this would be the use of a word such as "partner", "boyfriend" and the like, which had initially been included in the questionnaire guide.

Fabienne (Paris, 55)

FJ: Is your partner ("partenaire") the most important person in your life? Or, to put it differently, who are the other most important people in your life?

F: Apart from my partner ("mon, ma partenaire")? Err, that's difficult to say, right.⁹¹

⁸⁹Original: "Grundsätzlich ist das n sehr schönes harmonisches Bild. – Wobei ich sagen muss, äh, das ist ja auch ne Geschmacksfrage, bei, bei aller Offenheit. Ich bin eher nen Mensch, der gerade auch was das Körperliche und die Sexualität betrifft, äh, mich auf eine Person beziehe. Also das muss ja nicht unbedingt, äh, dieses Bild sagt nicht unbedingt aus, dass die vorher oder nachher Gruppensex haben, sondern einfach irgendwie gelöst miteinander umgehen, äh, aber, äh, ja, - interessant ist ja auch immer, was für Ideen entstehen gerade bei dir im Kopf, also jetzt bei mir aufgrund, äh, eines solchen Bildes. Prinzipiell hab ich damit kein Problem, prinzipiell ist das auch n schönes Bild, - ich selber könnte mich jetzt in der oder der Rolle nicht unbedingt sehen."

⁹⁰Original: "Ja, ist schön. So hätt ich gern meine Kindheit erlebt, dass so ne Bilder einfach existieren und – auch das Unterschiedlichste einfach zeigen, was möglich ist. Aber ich habs trotzdem genossen n Außenseiter zu sein. [...] Dicke Männer mit dicken Kindern. [lacht]"

⁹¹Original: "FJ: Est-ce que votre *partenaire* est la personne la plus importante dans, dans votre vie ? Ou, autrement dit, quelles sont les autres personnes importantes pour vous dans votre vie ? - F: A part *mon, ma partenaire* ? Mm, c'est difficile à dire, hein."

Initially prepared in English, the French version of the questionnaire guide had included the term "partenaire", which was subsequently taken up by respondents as can be seen in Dominique's case, but also in various others. Retrospectively, the term seemed badly translated and hardly common in practice, but must have been understood by the respondents as a common social science term. As the wording is not the main concern of the study, this does not appear to be a major problem. But it indicates the facility with which even unusual descriptions of concepts in the questions are easily taken up by the respondents. This was subsequently looked at with greater care and partly included in the interviews, through asking explicitly what term the respondent would use: "How would you say, your boyfriend? Your partner?"

2.3.7. Alternative routes

In contrast to what has been said about the idea of approaching only a certain "milieu", a limited exploration of alternative approaches to lesbian and gay perspectives on the recognition of same-sex couples has been included in the study. A focus group discussion in an association of young lesbian and gays was led, the interviewing of some important public personalities was envisaged and carried out on a very limited scale. Regarding the question of access, the snowball technique was used in two cases to interview specifically targeted types of people, once with a long-term couple in Rome, and once with a man who had registered his partnership in Berlin.

One should also add here again that in five cases, the interviews with people approached in bars were held with more than one person at the same time. Mostly this had been agreed beforehand on the wish of the respondents, while in one case, the interviewee brought a friend along to the arranged appointment.

In the case of the snowball method, the respondent in Berlin who had signed a registered partnership had been politically active in the gay press, denouncing gay marriage as a conservative threat. He had registered his partnership shortly after the introduction of registered partnership, based on the need for a residence permit for his non-EU partner. He is also a drag queen, DJ and club-promoter in Berlin. While the interview was conducted as in the other cases, his wedding experience and his view on the political debates informed a substantial part of the interview:

Gloria (Berlin, 37)

... and the issue for us was that Robert [Gloria's boyfriend] of course wanted to keep the whole thing small and secret, as he always does things, but as I'm somehow well known and also known as an opponent to gay marriage, and I said I can't do a small thing. Either I make it into something big and put a twist on it or I don't do it at all. And I did it, I really had the full wedding regalia with a really long train, longer than the one Lady Di had [laughs]. But then, in a classic style, I had sprayed plenty of slogans onto it: against immigration laws. And then we made it a really big thing. We had a big invitation which said that anyone who is not German risks losing their residence permit, and things like that, and that a way of avoiding that is marriage, even if it is not necessarily a desirable form of being together or a blessing through the State.⁹²

For the rest of the interview, many aspects of personal life, perspectives etc. that were described were not substantially at odds with other interview material.

In the other case, a long-term couple was interviewed in Rome, partly to explore the underrepresented male long-term couples in the sample. The interview was conducted with both partners jointly but in the same way as the other interviews. While the two respondents indicated their reluctance to frequent the Roman gay bars or clubs, the discourses in this case did not clash with the fieldwork obtained through the bar access.

2.3.8. Focus group

The focus group interview differed substantially in access and structure. The respondents were not recruited in bars or cafés but through an association, the MAG youth group in Paris for young lesbians and gays up to age 26. The discussion took place at the MAG itself and was open to all who were willing to participate; four young men and one women participated. Most of them would also go to lesbian and gay bars in Paris, but many also had a bad opinion of these and stated that they rarely frequented them. One could therefore conclude that the associative frame constitutes a different milieu or field. The youth group, as a "coming out" group could also be seen as a place connected to a very specific phase in life that is likely to affect discourses on homosexuality, society, the couple etc. Overall, however, similar

⁹² Original: "... und dann war halt dieses Ding bei uns so n bisschen, dass Robert [his boyfriend], Robert das natürlich eigentlich ganz klein und heimlich machen wie er immer alles macht, und ich aber irgendwie ja nun bekannt bin, und dann als Homogegner [Homo-Ehe-Gegner] auch bekannt war, und hab gesagt kann das nicht klein machen. Entweder mach ich das richtig dick und versuch's irgendwie noch umzudrehen oder ich mach's gar nicht. – Und in sofern hatt ich dann halt wirklich n Fummel mit Hochzeitskleidchen, und hatte halt so ne lange Schleppe, länger als die von Lady Di [schmunzelt] und hatte halt dann aber ganz klassisch irgendwie mit Sprühdose so lauter Sprüche gegen's Ausländergesetz hinten draufgesprüht, und dann hatten wir halt, ja we gesagt, großes Dings drum gemacht. Hatten schon ne große Einladung drin wo auch drinsteht irgendwie halt, wer nicht deutsch ist, ist halt von Abschiebung bedroht und so was, und – eine Möglichkeit ist es halt davon die Ehe,

differences of views were expressed between the focus group members as in the other interview settings. The following two passages exemplify this observation, the first on living with a partner, the second on signing a Pacs or marrying:

MAG youth group, Paris (Cédric 18, Bastien 20, Tarek 21, Jeanne 20, Han 26)

Tarek: I know I can't live with someone every day.

Han: I love that.

Tarek: It's impossible.

Bastien: Yes, no...

Han: Yes but that's because you haven't found met the right person yet.

Tarek: No, I don't have [a boyfriend] but I know that thing. You know, I have friends, ...

Bastien: Before him, before him, for me, there are my friends...

Tarek: ... when I see them every day...

Han: It's not the same thing, when you are in love.

Cédric: It's not the same [thing]!

Han: It's not the same thing.

Bastien: I can't, I don't want to downgrade my friends. Err, I love him, I would do many things for him. But, - but there are, there are my friends whom I have known for longer than him, and I can't, from one day to the next – that would be too egoistic. I can't allow myself to do that. It wouldn't be an honest thing to do.

Cédric: But sometimes you have to do. Now you say that because you are not yet in that frame, but...⁹³

In this passage, the question of sharing a flat with the boyfriend/girlfriend is developed. Without the interviewer's intervention, the different importance of a partnership and friendships is introduced by the conflicting views of Tarek and Bastien. The use of focus group discussions for data collection in the social sciences has often been discarded or criticised due to a lack of validity and reliability which is seen as inherent to the uncontrollable group dynamics which create unique discussions rather than verifiable data.⁹⁴ Instead, they are often viewed as a tool for generating hypotheses in preliminary studies, mainly due to their non-directive character, where debates arise without the researcher's interference.

auch wenn s nicht unbedingt die erstrebenswerte Form von Zusammenleben ist, oder Absegnung durch den Staat."

⁹³ Original: "Tarek : Moi je sais je peux pas vivre avec quelqu'un chaque jour.

Han : Moi j'adore ça.

Tarek : C'est impossible.

Bastien : Oui, non...

Han : Oui mais parce que tu connais pas la personne encore avec qui le faire.

Tarek : Mais non, j'ai pas [de copain ?] mais je connais ça. Tu sais j'ai des amis, ...

Bastien : Avant lui, avant lui, moi, y a les amis ...

Tarek : ... quand je les vois chaque jour...

Han : C'est pas pareil, si t'es amoureux.

Cédric : C'est pas la même [chose] !

Han : C'est pas la même chose.

Bastien : Je peux pas, je peux pas déborder [dénigrer ?] mes amis, euh, je l'aime, je ferais beaucoup de choses pour, pour lui. Mais, - mais y a, y a mes amis que je connais depuis plus longtemps que que lui, et tu peux pas du jour au lendemain, ça serait trop égoïste. Je peux pas me permettre ça. Ce serait pas honnête.

Cédric: Mais parfois il faut faire. - Là tu te dis ça parce que tu n'es pas encore dans le cadre, mais ..."

⁹⁴ Ralf Bohnsack. "Gruppendiskussionen." Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke, eds. (2000), *Qualitative Forschung*: 369-384, see pp. 372f.

In the following passage, in contrast to the previous one however, the interviewer exercises a more dominant role in guiding the discussion, eventually asking questions to individual participants:

MAG youth group, Paris (Cédric 18, Bastien 20, Tarek 21, Jeanne 20, Han 26)

FJ: And in the long-run, are you interested in the idea of the Pacs or marriage?

Jeanne: Yes, after, yeah, maybe. Well, you see, you, - it's, it's clear that after, err, if I am in a relationship with someone and if, well, you see, it's for sure that it's, it's totally good, you know, really. Really, that's clear.

FJ: Mm.

Jeanne: But now, well, no.

FJ: Mm.

[different voices]

Han: I would quite like to marry.

Cédric: [ironically:] In a the white dress.

Han and Cédric: [laugh]

Han: I think I won't do *that* after all. It's tempting, but I won't do it. But ...

FJ: And you, Cédric, in the long-run, marriage, the Pacs?

Cédric: Already, I am against marriage. Whereas for the Pacs, I conceive of other doing it – I'm not confident enough, at least today, but maybe in life?

FJ: Mm.

Cédric: But I need to find the right person.⁹⁵

The question here is to what extent the material can be used in the analysis of the other interviews. Initially, the focus group had been launched with a view to a possible comparison of different age groups, where younger and older focus groups would have been organized in each city. However, the idea was quickly dropped as a complementary method to the individual interviews due to the scope of the additional work: the first focus group alone resulted in an 80 page transcription.

Its use can be twofold. First, as an alternative route to data collection, an impression of the validity or non-validity of the main approach can be gained. Retrospectively, the dynamics of

⁹⁵ Original: "FJ : Et à long terme, ça t'intéresse, l'idée du Pacs ou du mariage ?

Jeanne : Oui, après, ouais, peut-être. Enfin tu vois, on, - c'est, c'est sûr que après, euh, si je suis en couple avec quelqu'un et que, enfin tu vois, c'est sûr que c'est, c'est vachement bien, quoi, vraiment. Vraiment c'est sûr.

FJ : Mm.

Jeanne : Mais, là maintenant, ben non.

FJ : Mm.

[diverses voix]

Han : Moi j'aimerais bien me marier.

Cédric: [Ironique :] Avoir la robe blanche.

Han et Cédric: [rient]

Han : Je pense que ça je le ferais pas quand même. C'est tentant, mais je le ferais pas. – Mais...

FJ : Et toi Cédric, à long terme, le mariage, le Pacs ? -

Cédric: Déjà que je suis contre le mariage, alors que, pour le Pacs, - je conçois que les autres le fassent mais, - j'ai pas assez confiance, - en tout cas aujourd'hui, [... ?] mais peut-être dans la vie ?

FJ : Mm.

the discussion reflected the rationale of the questionnaire guide in many ways, and views and experiences reflected similar contrasts and diversities as the interviews with individuals. A multiplication of such alternative paths of access to different types of lesbian and gay milieus could constitute an indication, or counter indication for that matter, that the scope of the research, even if not representative, could be seen as relevant for lesbians and gays more broadly defined. Secondly, the material could be used in the analysis in a similar manner to the other interviews, provided that the context is made explicit.

2.3.9. *Public personalities*

Interviews with public personalities were considered on an exploratory basis. The wish to include in particular the mayors of Berlin and Paris came about due to the key role they have been given by observers for the social changes in the public perception of homosexuality at the time of the legislative changes in France and Germany. Indeed, their names repeatedly come up in the interviews held in Berlin and Paris. However, after time-consuming attempts to organize such interviews, and after one interview was given by Christophe Lasnier, member of Bertrand Delanoë's mayoral team and responsible for questions regarding the homosexual community and homosexuality, the idea was given up. One interview was held with the openly gay British conservative MP Alan Duncan. The material of expert interviews or interviews with public personalities was thereafter considered to be more predictable than with those approached on a random basis, as they tended to add little to the material available in the media and in political publications on the matter.

Exploring alternative routes to a limited degree can be viewed as a good checking device on the validity of the methodological choices of the project and as a tool for evaluating different insights that may arise from other forms of data collection and interviewing. In this case, the additional interviews framed the findings from the *bar milieu* material without showing contradictions – and indeed similar discourses arose. The discourses from the alternative routes were however largely left aside in the main analysis.

While the idea of including alternative modes of access to the study seems contradictory given what has been said about the need to define a milieu, it can be added that in social practice, there are of course big overlaps between various lesbian and gay milieus in these cities. The

decision to restrict the mode of access to specific locations is linked to the idea of constructing methodological constraints which can potentially lead to “unexpected” encounters; the approaching of people who happen to be in a certain milieu such as in bars introduces an element of unpredictability. The methodological difficulty the researcher imposes on him- or herself through establishing a systematic method⁹⁶ provides a tool for looking beyond the beaten track of what would have been assumed at the outset. The interview practice indeed achieved this to some extent. The random encounters for the interviews were indeed enriching on a human and sociological level, made me discover several fascinating people and in many cases led to surprising discussions.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has explained the underlying theoretical understanding and the methodological choices of the approach and research design of the study. First, the definition of homosexuality was examined. Thereafter, the research field and the approach for this study were defined. In the last section, the interviewing practice was critically assessed. Thereby, critical reflections on the methodological and practical choices were made. The aim has been to clarify choices and make them explicit in order to contextualize the theoretical background, the practical scope and possible difficulties of the project.

In the next chapter, we shall take a first approach to the interview material by taking a specific look at the narratives on social acceptance, partnership recognition, the couple and projections onto partnership. While chapter 3 will be based on narratives linked to a limited set of respondents, which are examined in greater depth and in their biographical context, thereafter, in chapter 4, discourses on marriage, partnership and social acceptance will be reviewed in a broader manner, including overviews of the entire sample through the use of typologies.

⁹⁶ As mentioned above: Schütz (1962), “Common-sense and Scientific Interpretations”, p. 27

Chapter III

Biographical Narratives on Same-Sex Partnerships and Social Change

A first contextual reading of the thematic narratives

The following chapter will present the interview material through the different themes as they have been defined at the outset. The textual data of over 1,500 transcribed pages is impossible to present fully within the thesis. The findings may be analyzed and presented in different ways, from systematized coding of the material and a quantification of typologies within it to a presentation of the theoretical findings without reference to individual interviews. Beyond the restrictions and biases that a research design and fieldwork methods produce in a qualitative study, the reading of the material constitutes a similarly difficult set of choices which should in turn be made as explicit as possible.

The discourses can be read in two dimensions. One is related to the individual – a personal narrative that has a meaning in the biographical context of a single respondent. Views on partnership, the family or social acceptance within different social spheres are for example constructed in an immediate social context that is intensively linked to personal experiences: professional careers, friendships, political views, different forms of socialization in the cities where the respondent might have grown up or has recently moved to, and the like. The second interpretative dimension is that where the variety is looked at horizontally: what different lesbian and gay discourses arise in relation to a certain topic? How can these discourses be linked to the theoretical considerations that will be addressed in the analysis of recognition and the meaning it has for the field of research that the study engages with?

The presentation within the next two chapters will follow both of these two rationales. The aim is to look at the five themes separately and lay out the different steps of analysis that are implied in the evaluation of the material. This chapter focuses on an in-depth reading of a limited range of narratives. It proceeds along the biographical dimension of the discourses. Within this focus, this chapter will help to highlight interconnections between the themes. Also, various contradictions within individual discourses have to be taken on board. It is only in the following chapter that a more synthetic approach will allow for the integration of the

wider range of the overall material into the analysis. Chapter IV will thereby help to explore how the interview material can be put into an analytic grid concerning the respective sub-themes; it will present a broader view on the discourses present in the fieldwork as a whole and grasp the different types of discourses that can be found. The coding and the formulation of discursive typologies will be better understood after the initial biographical presentations. This present chapter has thus both the function of a first presentation of the findings, as well as a methodological one that lays the foundation for the subsequent analysis.

Together, these two chapters explain, in a sometimes exemplified and sometimes simplified way, how meaning is gleaned from the vast range of interview texts. Thereafter, a closer look at the question of identity will lead to a theoretical framework (chapter 5) and to a final analytical step in which the theories and ideas that are addressed are brought back to the centre of the analysis.

Along those lines this chapter, on individual narratives, is again divided into two. First, only one interview is reviewed, in order to analyse the interview context with a single example. The interview picked here is that of Christophe, a 39 year-old respondent in Paris. An individual narrative combines discourses in a way that could be contradictory as to the opinions that would be expressed in a quantitative survey. At the same time, the narrative produces a biographical coherence that helps to underline the way narrative and identity-talk are constructed on the level of the individual. For this initial analysis, the first two themes (normative frame, social change) are therefore seen as blurred within the biographical dimension.

In a second step, a slightly broader view will be taken on the remaining three themes (couple life, projection, and public identity), where a still limited selection of four interviews will be included in the analysis. The idea is to proceed analytically from the individual case to larger numbers. While in this next step will the four respondents' narratives be presented as biographical narratives, the analysis will also draw on comparative observations between the four respondents discourses.

Finally, it should be added that in contrast to the following chapters, the presentation of the interview narratives and interviewees' discourses is seen as overall limited to the textual data

itself. For now, then, the question is: what do they make of the interview situation? rather than: what meaning do they have in the light of previous research in the field?

3.1. Christophe

For the first two sub-themes, Christophe's case has been chosen here more or less at random¹ as an example illustrating the biographical narrative and how it is interlinked with normative discourses. It also highlights several discursive elements that will be relevant for the analysis later on in the text.

In the details asked at the end of the interview, Christophe is characterized as the following:

Contacted at "Open Café", Marais/Paris IV, 05/01/04, Interview at "Marronniers", 07/01/04
39 years old
Civil servant (fonctionnaire) in Information Technology
Graduate (MA level, "bac+4, bientôt bac+5")
Born in Bordeaux
Lived in Bordeaux until 2000, in Paris region thereafter
Lives in Gennevilliers (département 92), suburb
Lives on his own
French, family origins from French Antilles:
He describes himself as "négropolitain" (black born in mainland France)²
Ex-boyfriend 28 years old, now graduated (bac+3) was student then
Now: no relationship, but seeing someone for four months
No children
Parents are married
Relationship to father and mother : very good
"Not at all" religious. Religion of "no importance at all"
Politically: Left
Organizations etc: trade union member (CFDT, a centre-left trade union)

For all other respondents, short biographical abstracts are provided in appendix I.

Christophe considers himself single even though he has been having some kind of (problematic) relationship for several months (see personal details above). He describes himself as fundamentally marked by a five-year relationship, the end of which leaves him with a certain distrust of committed partnership. He is state employed and an active trade union

¹ It has been chosen as an interview that is not "a-typical" in that most viewpoints and elements of discourses Christophe tells in the interview are present in various other ones. The fluency of the interview is also a criterion which excludes the use of some interviews for the current purpose. Finally, Christophe's narrative includes various elements that will become more central to the analysis in chapter 5. Beyond these elements, the selection of this interview rather than another is of no particular interest, as it is not intended to "represent" other interviews.

² The personal details, while asked according to a fixed grid, are transcribed according to what is answered in addition to how it could be classified by the researcher. In this case, the fact that the respondent's parents are from the Antilles clearly does not relate to the respondent's nationality, but is an attribution to a French Afro-Caribbean background that he added as a description of himself.

member. Having moved to Paris about four years ago, he sees Paris as ultimately harmful to gay relationships because there are too many "temptations". Instead, he reports, committed partnerships were far easier to construct in his home city, Bordeaux. Whilst expressing irony over his participation in the study throughout the interview, Christophe was very willing to respond and was ready to take an hour for the recorded interview.

3.1.1. *Christophe, Normative frames*

While Christophe sees the recognition of same-sex couples as generally a good thing on the political level, he distances himself vehemently from considering this an option for himself:

Christophe (Paris, 39)

FJ: Could you personally imagine formalising your relationship or, if you were in a couple, to sign a Pacs for example?

C: Err-

FJ: Or what advantages do you see in it, or, on the contrary, what disadvantages?

C: Well, my answer will be categorical, it's a no. [laughs] I don't see any advantages in it. I don't necessarily see disadvantages in it. [...] No, I don't want to sign anything before a court or a town hall or anywhere, I'm not interested in it. I mean, it's good that it exists, but as for marriage, I'm not interested. [...] The same for the Pacs. Even if it is for financial problems or anything, it doesn't interest me. That's my point of view. But then, having said that, I am not against the Pacs. I think it's good that it exists. Then everyone puts into it whatever they want. I don't see any advantage or disadvantage in it. No, it leaves me without any particular opinion. [...] I had a partnership for five years and the idea of signing a Pacs or anything like that never crossed our minds.³

He says he is "categorical" about his "no" to registering a partnership in any way, even if he were in a stable relationship, which is currently is not the case. In another passage, his past relationship is implicitly characterized as a *ready-to-marry* relationship: "Well at a time, it could have interested me, but it didn't."⁴ This potential interest thus seems to have been linked to the fact that it was a stable relationship in which thinking about Pacs or marriage might consequentially have been appropriate. But even in such a situation, he had never, according to his narrative, dedicated any thought to a Pacs or marrying. It is noteworthy that the firm and repeated objection to the idea of signing a Pacs or marrying, as we have seen, comes along

³ Original: "FJ: Toi-même tu peux t'imaginer une forme de formalisation de ton couple, ou si tu étais en couple, de signer un Pacs par exemple ? - C: Euh. - FJ: Ou quels avantages y vois-tu, ou au contraire, quels inconvénients ? - C: Alors ma réponse va être très catégorique, c'est non. [rire] J'y vois pas d'avantages. J'y vois pas forcément des inconvénients. [...] Non, j'ai pas envie de signer quoi que ce soit devant, devant une juridiction ou un maire ou quoi que ce soit, ça m'intéresse pas quoi. Je veux dire, c'est bien que ça existe, mais tout comme le mariage, ça m'intéresse pas. [...] Et le Pacs pareil, quoi ça me - non. Même si c'est pour des soucis financiers ou quoi que ce soit, ça m'intéresse pas quoi. C'est mon point de vue. Mais bon, ceci dit je suis pas contre le Pacs, je suis, pour que ça existe. Après chacun y met ce qu'il veut derrière. Et, non, moi j'en tirerais aucun avantage, aucun inconvénient quoi. Non non, ça me laisse sans avis particulier. [...] Je suis resté en couple cinq ans. Ça a à aucun moment donné, un moment, à aucun moment donné on a eu l'idée de se pacser ou quoi que ce soit."

⁴ Original: " Enfin, à une époque ça aurait pu m'intéresser, mais ça ne m'intéressait pas."

with "disinterest", and he tells of no particular objections and disadvantages he could see in signing a Pacs: "without any particular opinion."⁵ These two elements, a vehement rejection on the one hand, and the affirmation of indifference on the other, could be read as a contradiction, but are clearly linked in the narrative.

The fact that the Pacs exists as a legal option is instead seen as a good thing: "My opinion is [...] rather favourable. [...] It's a form of recognition and it deserves to exist, so why not?"⁶ At a later stage, commenting on a picture of lesbian and gay weddings, he approves of the pictures as a (positively judged) social evolution: "It could actually be the family of tomorrow."⁷

In addition to his distantly positive judgment on the legal developments, he advocates an improvement of the Pacs. The distance Christophe had put between advances and political claims is not one that would characterize him as being 'apolitical' on the issue. Instead, as the following passage shows, he conceives his view as being a political one but as not being in his own interest. He gives evidence of a comparatively good knowledge of the legal terms of the Pacs and places his normative discourse largely in the rationale of an "equality of rights" claim:

Well the Pacs that we have today is good. It needs to be improved [though] with regards to adoption and inheritance rights, this sort of things. The same goes for the financial side of things: the period before it takes effect needs to be much shorter. You see, if I came up with a law it would be in the style of the Pacs, but perhaps a little bit more progress oriented, a bit more geared towards recognition. Adoption and so on, yes. Yes, yes. That's for sure, yes. [laughs] Yes, yes, yes. Well we don't have to deny it: the Pacs exists [now]. But, having said this, there is no recognition of adoption. There are homosexual couples who adopt anyway, so ...⁸

These claims of "more recognition" seem ultimately to be based on "what exists", as quoted above. Hence, even though not explicitly so, Christophe's view seems to indicate that the State may ideally provide legal frameworks for what exists in social practice.

⁵ Original: "sans avis particulier."

⁶ Original: "J'ai une opinion [...] plutôt favorable. [...] C'est une forme de reconnaissance et ça a le mérite d'exister, donc pourquoi pas."

⁷ Original: "Ça peut être effectivement la famille de demain."

⁸ Original: "Ben la forme du Pacs aujourd'hui, elle est bien. Il faut l'améliorer par rapport à l'adoption, par rapport à la succession, des choses comme ça. L'aspect fiscal des choses, pareil, il faut que ce soit dans des délais beaucoup plus courts. Voilà. Si j'avais une loi, ça serait style Pacs, mais peut-être un peu plus, un peu plus progressiste, un peu plus dans la reconnaissance. L'adoption et cetera et cetera oui. Oui oui. Ça c'est clair oui. [rire] Oui, oui oui. Bon, faut pas se nier ; le Pacs existe. Mais ceci dit, il y a pas la reconnaissance à l'adoption, y a des couples homos qui adoptent malgré tout quoi, donc."

Adoption had been controversial among some other respondents in Paris, and indeed has been widely debated in France since the Pacs were brought into the political debate.⁹ Here, Christophe thinks an extension of the rights accorded to same-sex couples is necessary. Again, his criticism is largely consistent with activists and specialists who point to the shortcomings of the Pacs.¹⁰ Similarly, he refers to the fact that there are already lesbian and gay parents: "There are homosexual couples who adopt anyway"¹¹. Indeed, in the French context, this gap between the factual existence of gay and lesbian families and the legal context for couples refers to the fact that singles can adopt, thereby rendering the legal context for same-sex couples counterfactual both for gays and lesbian who have adopted and for lesbian couples who are raising "first marriage" children or children they have had by means of artificial insemination.¹² However, in line with Christophe's discourse on the Pacs, this political claim is not one he considers as an option for himself:

C: I love children. But I don't want to have children myself. [laughs] That's clear. And that's not a recent [decision], that's been my point of view I already had ages ago. I never wanted children, so.

FJ: Yeah.

C: Even if at one stage I could have had children, it was out of the question.¹³

Christophe pronounces himself as categorically not wanting to have children and not wanting to sign a Pacs, where here the phrase "even if at one stage I could have" refers to an early heterosexual relationship. Just as for the rejection of the Pacs for himself, he underlines his abstinence from such life projects as being independent of the absence of the concrete possibility (with a woman) in his present circumstances.

Finally, regarding the question of how marriage should be viewed, or how it can be defined, Christophe defends what one could call a traditional view of stable commitment. If one says yes to marriage, for him it should be for a lifetime. However, this statement (implied in the

⁹ See Borillo, Fassin and Iacub, eds. (1999), *Au-delà du PaCS*, particularly the chapters on the debate on parenthood at the time, e.g. Marcela Iacub, 'Homoparentalité et ordre procréatif' (pp. 189-204) and Anne Cadoret, 'La filiation des anthropologues face à l'homoparentalité' (pp. 205-224).

¹⁰ See e.g. *ibid.* Also, from an activist's perspective e.g. Jacques Fortin, *L'adieu aux normes*. (Paris: Editions Textuels, 2000), see pp. 127-130: "Le droit et nous: critique du Pacs."

¹¹ Original: "y a des couples homos qui adoptent malgré tout"

¹² In the French context, adoption by a single man or a single woman has been legally possible since 1966. We will discuss child adoption in further depth in chapter 6. See e.g. Daniel Borillo, "Homosexual individuals, same-sex couples and homoparental families: an analysis of the French legal reality." Weyembergh and Carstoccea (2006), eds., *Gays' and lesbians' rightsnion*: 49-80, see p. 66ff.

¹³ Original: "C: J'adore les enfants, mais j'ai pas envie d'avoir des enfants à moi. [rire] C'est clair. - Et ça date pas d'aujourd'hui hein, ça date d'y a très très longtemps, j'ai jamais voulu avoir d'enfants quoi, donc, - FJ: Ouais. -C: Même si un, un moment donné j'ai pu en avoir, non. C'était hors de question quoi."

question asked) is then nuanced to a "certain duration" ("certaine durée") which yet again cannot be guaranteed:

FJ: Is marriage, according to you, something for an entire lifetime?

C: Oh yes. Should I marry, but well that's not the case today, yes, then it's for a lifetime, yes. Well, nothing lasts forever. But the commitment, if there is a commitment of this type, marriage or another one, -

FJ: Mm.

C: - is for a certain duration, possibly even for an entire life.

FJ: Mm.

C: But it is true that human relations cannot guarantee a relationship for life, you know. I don't know if I was being precise in my answer. So, already, well, we will say [it's] a long-term thing. For one's whole life would be the ideal.¹⁴

Hence marriage "for life" - a notion which had been suggested in the interview question - represents the "ideal" type of commitment that marriage implies as an institution. Christophe is spontaneously affirmative of such a definition: "Oh yes" ("Ah oui"). One should observe his personalized answer to the question, where his formulation "Should I marry" ("si je dois me marier" could also be translated as "If I have to marry") stresses that he does not want to give a normative opinion about what others see in it. To a certain degree, Christophe associates the value of commitment, and even lifelong commitment, with marriage. But he simultaneously rejects it outright, as we have seen in his previous personal distancing from marriage or the *Pacs*. His formulation in this extract is quite different from a categorical rejection in the one we quoted above: it takes a momentary character, as he puts it: "that's not the case today" ("c'est pas le cas aujourd'hui"), which implies that at another moment, in different circumstances, it could be.

As we can see, with different sets of questions throughout the interview, the nuances of Christophe's personal rejection of marriage and the *Pacs* differ quite significantly on the discursive level. Yet again, when asked about the influence which marriage or the *Pacs* could have on the sexual lives of the partners, in general terms, Christophe focuses on the fact that these commitments can just as easily be broken:

FJ: Would a commitment of that kind [*Pacs* or marriage] change anything about your sex life?

C: No, it wouldn't change anything about my sex life. [...] A *Pacs*, a marriage, can also be broken, so, [laughs]

¹⁴ Original: "FJ : Le mariage, à ton avis, c'est quelque chose pour toute la vie ?- C: Ah oui. - Si je dois me marier, mais bon, c'est pas le cas aujourd'hui, oui, c'est pour toute la vie, oui. Enfin, y a rien qui dure toujours. Mais l'engagement, si y a un engagement de ce type là, mariage ou autre, - FJ: Mm. C: - c'est pour une certaine durée, quitte à que ce soit toute la vie quoi. -FJ : Mm. - C: Mais c'est vrai que les relations humaines ne peuvent pas garantir une relation pour toute la vie quoi. Je [ne] sais pas si j'étais précis dans ma réponse. Mais disons que, un engagement, oui un engagement c'est pour du durable. Alors, déjà, bon on va dire à long terme. Pour toute la vie, ça serait l'idéal."

FJ: Yes, yes, exactly.

C: It's not because there's no sex that it is broken, but, well, I mean it wouldn't change anything. It wouldn't change anything. It isn't the commitment, the act [of marriage or the Pacs] itself, [not] the legal act that would change anything.

FJ: Mm.

C: Anyway, I don't see what could change. No, it wouldn't change anything.¹⁵

What marriage (and the Pacs) represents for Christophe thus remains slightly contradictory in that the firm rejection is accompanied by some expressions of idealization on the one hand, and indifference on the other. While it implies commitment, the commitment would not change the course of events; and while the lifelong duration of marriage is affirmed, the option of breaking the commitment is underlined. Since the actual impact of Pacs or marriage on the partners' lives is downplayed ("it wouldn't change anything") in relation to sex life, but also more generally (as to ending a relationship), it seems that his rejection of such a form of an institutionalized partnership is related to ideological connotations rather than to actual implications of marriage. In other words, it is the connotations that he does not want to subscribe to. As we shall see in chapter 4 and 5, a second element in his rejection seems to be linked to a notion of placing sexuality and partnership in the realm of privacy which he does not have to justify to anyone (unless he wants to), including by implication the State. This aspect of Christophe's discourse will be discussed further in chapter 5.

As we have seen above, on the legislative level, Christophe acquiescently accepts the existence of marriage and the Pacs. Indeed, he welcomes this option for same-sex couples in terms of "progress" and in line with a more tolerant society, but places it in the context of a broader societal shift:

FJ: And, according to you, where do these changes come from? As you said, you see these changes a bit everywhere?

C: [...] There certainly is a development in people's mindsets. And [also for] the fact that the Pacs has been passed in France, that's clear. I think that was perhaps the key moment that triggered it all, when things developed a lot, because the majority of the political class agreed on it, be it on the left or on the right, with exception of the extreme parties.¹⁶ But yes, there is the effect of the Pacs and there is the impact of gay and lesbian associations, [...] ActUp and who else? And the Gay Pride has nevertheless existed for a couple of years in France, and is also more and more seen in the provinces. It's [more than] nothing. And, so, all these

¹⁵ Original: "FJ: Pour toi un engagement de ce genre changerait-il quelque chose dans ta vie sexuelle? [...] - C: Non. Dans ma vie sexuelle, non, ça changerait rien. [...] Un Pacs ça se défait, un mariage ça se défait, donc, [rire]. - FJ: Oui oui, tout à fait. - C: C'est pas parce qu'il y a pas de sexe que ça se défait, mais bon, je veux dire ça changerait rien du tout non. Ça changerait rien. C'est pas l'engagement, l'acte en lui-même, l'acte juridique. Enfin, qui a, qui va changer quelque chose quoi. - FJ: Mm. - C: D'ailleurs je vois pas ce qui pourrait changer. Non, non ça changerait rien."

¹⁶ In referring to the "extremes", one should take Christophe's mention as referring to the extreme right, and not to the extreme left.

phenomena, all these things, make that things develop more and more, they go ahead ["avance"]. Society goes advances.¹⁷

"Society advances" ("la société avance") most explicitly characterizes the progress discourse: understood as advances that occur, so it would seem, through an invisible hand on different levels and in a linear way. A "visibility" effect is clearly depicted in the context of the Pacs, where however the role played by the law itself remains unclear. In Christophe's discourse it can be read either as a symptom only or also as a motor of social change implied in the wording "moment that triggered it" ("moment déclencheur"), that the Pacs itself has a consequential effect. The (counterfactual) view which is given here, that the left and right agreed on reforms, supports his view of a general push towards acceptance through the fact of what "exists" and through the fact that its social existence has become integrated into social norms. In a sense, rather than as a political agenda attributed to specific political parties, recognition appears as a logical step. One should add here that the consensual image of the introduction of the Pacs does not correspond to the actual parliamentary debate in 1998.¹⁸ In this narrative however, it seems to be a social force moving towards the recognition of homosexuality in French society, with the Pacs as a certain "moment that triggered it" but not as a principal motor of social acceptance. As additional motors of change, in line with his overall politically interested discourse, he states political gay and lesbian associations, including ActUp in particular, and the Gay Pride - an initially political event organized by lesbian and gay associations. This passage thereby links in with the next theme, the question of social change.

Before moving on to social change, a rephrasing summary of Christophe's normative view on Pacs and marriage should be provided. In order to construct a typology of normative frames, in a first step, one could characterise his overall view by restating it as follows:

¹⁷ Original: "FJ: Et de ton avis, ça vient d'où ces changements ? Tu vois ces changements un peu partout comme tu dis ? - C: [...] Il y a sûrement une évolution de la mentalité des gens. Et le fait que le Pacs soit passé en France, ça c'est clair. Je crois que c'est peut-être le moment déclencheur, où les choses ont beaucoup évolué. Puisque la classe politique était majoritairement d'accord, que se soit de gauche ou de droite, sauf si on va dans les extrêmes. Mais, ouais, y a l'effet Pacs et y a l'effet que les associations gays et lesbiens, [...] Act-Up et qui autre ? Et la Gay Pride qui existe depuis quelques années en France quand même. Et qui se voit de plus en plus en province. Ça n'est pas rien. Et, donc tous ces phénomènes là, toutes ces choses là font que de plus en plus les choses évoluent et avancent. La société avance."

¹⁸ This analysis is at odds with voting and most comments at the time of the Pacs debate in 1998 and 1999 (See e.g. Borillo and Lascoumes, (2002), *Amours égales?*). It could instead but read as referring to the later acceptance of the Pacs by the conservative governments of Raffarin and de Villepin. None made steps to restrict the Pacs, and on the contrary announced improvements, without however taking concrete steps in that direction. See e.g. the restating of the claims announced at the gay pride 2005 in *Humanité* 27/06/2005: "Le gouvernement Raffarin puis celui du nouveau premier ministre Dominique de Villepin se sont successivement déclarés prêt à améliorer le pacs. Mais aucun engagement n'a été pris." Such a shift from confrontation to consensus has equally been discussed above in chapter 1.

Synthesis:

"It's a good thing that it exists and that people can use it. There should be equality of rights for same-sex couples. Gay and lesbian couples are a social fact and so are gay and lesbian parents and the Law should take note of this. This form of recognition helps the visibility of homosexuality on the political level. But personally, I don't want either Pacs or marriage or children myself."

In terms of the typologies further down, concerning the societal question "Should there be same-sex marriage?", Christophe will be classified as favourable to the opening of same-sex marriage (typology: "Yes"). Concerning the question "Would you want to marry?", Christophe will be classified as opposed to the idea for himself (typology: "No, I don't think so"). While the first one, favourable to same-sex marriage in its legal existence, is rather dominant throughout the interviews, the second one, rejecting marriage on the personal level, proves to be a minority position but no exception within the sample of the study.

3.1.2. Christophe, Social Change

Turning to the next sub-theme, that of social change, the question of the Pacs itself becomes slightly peripheral, as we saw when the question of the effect of the Pacs was reviewed. Instead, in addition to the Pacs and legal change, the idea of social change and progress refers more to society and homosexuality as a whole. What account does Christophe give of non-acceptance and acceptance of homosexuality over time?

FJ: Has something changed? Do you think that something has changed through the legal recognition of gay and lesbian couples?

C: In French society?

FJ: Yes.

C: Well, yes, yes, yes. There are things that have changed: on the political level because the mayor of Paris is gay, and openly gay, of Berlin as well; then, at work, on the level of trade unions there are things happening, in my trade union organization in particular. Err, then, in society, in the media, they talk more and more about it. This being said, there are still many things to be done, because the way in which the media treat it is a little, a little, it's a little bit *in your face* if I may say so. So I don't know if that's an effect the Pacs has had or not. But yes, there are things that have changed: on the political level, and in the workplace as well. There are many things that have changed. Well, many things? Lets say that things are developing, right? There is less reluctance or anything, so, yes: there are things that are developing. That's clear, yes.¹⁹

¹⁹ Original: "FJ : Est-ce que quelque chose a changé ? Est-ce que tu penses que par la reconnaissance légale des couples gays et lesbiens quelque chose a changé ? - C : Dans la, dans la société, française ? -FJ : Oui. - C : Ben oui, oui, oui. Y a des choses qui ont changé. Sur l'aspect politique, parce que le maire de Paris est gay, et ouvertement gay, de Berlin aussi. Après dans le travail, au niveau syndical, il y a des choses qui se font, notamment dans ma section syndicale. Euh, -après au niveau de la société, au niveau des médias, on en parle de plus en plus. Ceci dit il y a beaucoup de choses à faire encore, parce que la façon dont les médias en traitent, c'est un peu, un peu, - c'est un peu *attrape l'œil* quoi si j'ose dire. Mais, oui, y a des choses qui ont changé. Au niveau politique, dans le milieu du travail aussi. Y a beaucoup de choses qui ont changé. Enfin, beaucoup de choses, disons que les choses évoluent hein. Donc je ne sais pas si c'est l'effet Pacs ou pas l'effet Pacs. Mais ceci dit les choses évoluent. Y a

The question asked by the interviewer had explicitly referred to a possible influence of the *Pacs* on social changes, i.e. the question implicitly suggests a logical link between the two. It is therefore more significant that the *Pacs* as a form of legal recognition becomes peripheral in the answer.²⁰ The openly gay mayor of Paris of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, is named as a first reference to a change on the "political" level. Interestingly, the mayor of Berlin, also openly gay, is named in the same line, implying an influence of German local politics on French society.

As mentioned above, the changes are viewed in the light of social progress, which transcends various areas of social life: "things are developing" ("les choses évoluent") is a statement of social progress that is repeated three times in this short passage alone: "évoluer" ("evolve", "develop") is a word directly linked to the idea of a progress oriented path – different from the term "changer" used by the interviewer, which can potentially be positively or negatively connoted. The discourse is rather repetitive and does not so much point to concrete changes, but exemplifies the general sense of progress as a trend: as a lens through which different events and observations are read. Some developments, such as the media coverage, seem to deviate from the overall progress story: "there are still many things to be done" ("il y a beaucoup de choses à faire encore"). But the very idea that these things are "to be done" places the continuity of social progress in a time line from the past to the present through to the future. His critical position towards the media image of homosexuality amounts to claiming that it is somehow a misrepresentation of homosexuality through its showiness ("in your face"/"attrape l'œil"). However, the fact that people speak about it more than before is for him an indication of a clear change of mentality, one that he sees as a consensual shift within French society on the political level, as we have seen above.

In addition to this, there is a sense of a broader acceptance of homosexuality in society at large. This can be exemplified in a passage where Christophe refers to two men kissing at an underground station:

It was two men who really were, err, kissing each other, and – no reaction at all. So, err, in several public places, you know, in a metro station for example, there was no reaction at all. So,

moins de, y a moins de réticences ou quoi que ce soit, donc, euh, oui y a des choses qui, qui évoluent quoi, ça c'est clair oui."

²⁰ The question had been asked twice, once with reference to the *Pacs* (in this passage) and once without that reference.

err, apparently with time passing ["plus ça va": the more it goes] things are getting more accepted.²¹

"No reaction at all" in the context of the underground station clearly refers to an abstract understanding of society, in which a consensus of tolerating this kind of expression of tenderness has developed. However, in another passage, the overall consensus is breached in that there are certain areas where one needs to be careful:

Well, then again I think that you have to watch out about places. I mean there are certain suburbs; in some neighbourhoods I think it's risky, but then, well. [...] I think one has to be careful, because even if society evolves, not everybody is prepared to accept any kind of thing, well any kind of thing, I mean not everybody is prepared to accept it. So, you have to be careful. But then, this being said, a priori it's moving forward. Let's hope that it continues to move forward. [laughs]²²

As in mentioning the "extremes" above, on the political level, pockets of non-acceptance remain in Christophe's view. In quoting the "extremes", one must understand Christophe's presentation of political positions as referring to the extreme right in French politics. But these other segments of French society he refers to here – more based in everyday life – have a bigger influence on being careful ("watch out"/"faire gaffe") in simply walking through certain neighbourhoods and places which he refers to in rather abstract terms. The involvement of risk ("I think it's risky"/"à mon avis c'est prendre un risque") seems to cause an imminent geographical impact on Christophe's behaviour in a range of places or to even have as a consequence that he would avoid some areas altogether. However, despite this reference to risk and non-acceptance, Christophe subsequently returns to a progress narrative, as to nuance the image of difficulties. Immediately after noting the Parisian suburbs and "some neighbourhoods" ("certains quartiers"), as we have seen, the progress discourse is thus re-affirmed and may imply that consensual acceptance spreads to "everybody". But this view is in turn nuanced: "a priori" and "let's hope that it continues" ("pourvu que ça continue"). Both expressions imply hope and doubt as well as the belief in a relative likelihood of "progress".

The groups in which acceptance is lagging behind according to Christophe can be defined either geographically or culturally. Himself of French afro-Caribbean background

²¹ Original: "C'était deux hommes qui effectivement – euh, étaient en train de s'embrasser, et - aucune réaction. Donc, euh, dans plusieurs endroits publiques hein, dans une station de métro par exemple, euh, y avait aucune réaction, donc, euh, - apparemment plus ça va plus les choses sont acceptées."

²² Original: "Bon après je pense qu'il faut faire gaffe aux, - aux endroits. Je veux dire il y a certaines banlieues, dans certains quartiers, à mon avis, c'est prendre un risque, mais bon. [...] Je pense qu'il faut faire attention, - parce que, - même si la société évolue, tout le monde n'est pas prêt à accepter n'importe quoi, enfin n'importe quoi, je veux dire tout le monde n'est pas prêt à l'accepter quoi. Donc, euh, faut faire attention, - mais bon, ceci dit, a priori ça avance. - Pourvu que ça continue d'avancer. [petit rire]"

(Guadeloupe and Martinique are French "departments"),²³ he includes both his own and other cultural backgrounds in his analysis. In addition to the "banlieue" and "certains quartiers", he mentions Bordeaux, the Antilles, and Arab culture in France:

Bordeaux society is rather bourgeois. At a bus stop, two persons of the same sex who kiss each other, err, I'm not sure if it would leave [people] indifferent.²⁴

In this first passage, thus, the difference of social progress in Paris, on the one hand, and in provincial cities such as Bordeaux, on the other, is underlined. In contrast to this, the culturally defined groups that Christophe refers to are not geographically defined; they represent a topic of cultural difference that Christophe brought up when asked about any further points or observations at the end of the interview:

There are many things that are evolving on the Antilles. But it's still a taboo. Even in the families there are certainly still some very violent, very aggressive reactions, in certain families. And for North Africans ["Maghrébins"] it's the same. If only in relation to religion, their relation to religion, that's clear. [...] There are things, there is an identity, which – well at the Gay Pride there are Arab ["beur"] wagons and so on – but there is progress still to be made. There is progress to be made, because the Arabs I know live it hidden, they hide it, you know.²⁵

It remains partly ambiguous whether Christophe's observations on Bordeaux, the Antilles and Arabs fit into the progress discourse or are stagnant cultural differences. While the Antilles seem to follow the evolution trend slowly, development is described as "needed" rather than actually taking place in Arab subculture, and no reference to change is made as to the bourgeois reticence in Bordeaux.

In contrast to how he sees developments in society at large, he has not within his own circle of acquaintances observed any changes of how friends and family members see homosexuality. He however clearly affirms that it is easier to be gay today than in the 50s, 60s, even than in the 80s, as he says:

C: But, I, a priori, from my own experience, well, I speak mostly of my friends whom I see rather frequently and regularly, I think [it hasn't changed], you know, for [both] gay [and] non-

²³ Christophe: "I am of Caribbean (Antilles) background, but I was born in France, so I am what you call a Negropolitan." ("Je suis d'origine antillaise, mais je suis né un France, donc je suis ce qu'on appelle un Négropolitain.")

²⁴ Original: "La société bordelaise est assez bourgeoise, à une station de bus, deux personnes de même sexe qui s'embrassent, euh, je sais pas si ça laisserait indifférent."

²⁵ Original: "Y a des choses qui évoluent, aux Antilles, mais c'est encore tabou. Même dans les familles y a encore certainement des réactions très, très – violentes, très agressives, dans certaines familles, à. – Et chez les Maghrébins c'est pareil quoi. Ne serait-ce que par rapport à la religion, le rapport avec la religion, ça c'est clair quoi. [...] Y a des choses, - y a une identité qui est, bon à la gay pride, il y a des chars beurs et cetera. Mais y a des progrès encore à faire quoi. Y a des progrès à faire. Parce que les beurs que je connais, ils le vivent cachés quoi, ils le vivent cachés quoi."

gay friends. [...] I haven't felt any development in their [attitudes] following the Pacs, [or] following the election of Bertrand Delanoë. No development at all, no, no development at all.

FJ: In your family for example, would that be the same?

C: No development either, no. No, no, no. – No.

FJ: Do you think it's easier to be gay or lesbian today? Or is it the same...

C: Well yes, I think so. Yes. I think so. Well, I am still quite young [laughs]. I wasn't alive in the 50s, and even less so the 40s. I think today one surely is better off being gay than in the 40s. That's clear, yes. The little I know of what [gay] people were living in that period, I think that today it is much easier. Well, compared to the 80s, yes, yes I think so. In the 80s we wouldn't have the condom distributions; we wouldn't have the condom vending machines outside the pharmacies, so yes.²⁶

The reference to the distribution of condoms as first indication of easier gay life is interesting as he identifies condom policies only with gay life; it seems however to also refer to a relatively new free distribution of condoms targeting gays in the Marais at the time of the interview. The fact that Christophe sees no change of attitude towards homosexuality either in his own social environment or within certain social and/or cultural groups seems to indicate that the change is rather situated in an abstract societal understanding of what has become acceptable rather than in a concrete shift in opinions. The condom campaign instead represents a new *political* approach to sexuality and gay life in Paris: it seems to refer to an observation that homosexuality has been accorded a place in political action and in media representation that it did not have even in the recent past (1980s). However, when asked about what representation of homosexuality he thinks is most common, Christophe points to "the transvestite":

C: I think that in society the image is still the transvestite.

FJ: Mm.

C: That's [my] impression. It's just an impression. Those people who don't have an example, of a gay couple or homosexual persons around them, for them it's the transvestite, because that's what the media transmit. When you watch reports or news about the gay pride, what do you see? The wagons with the transvestites. The feathers, the party. Well, let's say first the feathers and the paste. And then, when people know a bit better, they rather see the partying in it. But [for] the [person] who is in the provincial countryside and so on, it's necessarily the transvestite, rather than saying the effeminate.²⁷

²⁶ Original: "C: Mais, je, - . Moi a priori, de connaissance, enfin, je parle surtout de mes amis quoi, que je vois assez souvent et régulièrement. Euh, - je crois que ça changerait rien (ça n'a pas changé) quoi. Amis homos ou pas homos quoi. [...] J'ai pas senti d'évolution de, de leur part, euh, suite à, suite au Pacs, suite à l'élection de Bertrand Delanoë. - Aucune, euh, non, aucune évolution quoi. Aucune évolution. - -

FJ: Dans ta famille par exemple ce serait pareil ?

C: Aucune évolution non plus. Non. Non non non. – Non.

FJ: Penses-tu que c'est plus facile d'être homo, gay ou lesbienne aujourd'hui ? Ou c'est pareil...

C: Ben oui. Oui, je pense, oui. Je pense. Enfin, - je suis assez jeune quand même, [rire] j'ai pas connu les années cinquante, ni encore moins les années quarante. Je pense [...] aujourd'hui on doit le vivre mieux que dans les années quarante cinquante. Ça c'est clair, oui. Le peu que - j'en sache de ce qu'on devait vivre à cette époque là, - oui je pense qu'aujourd'hui c'est beaucoup plus facile quoi. Euh, que même dans les années quatre vingt. – Oui, oui je pense oui. Dans les années quatre vingt on aurait pas eu les, distributions de préservatifs, on aurait pas eu des distributeur de préservatif à l'extérieur sur les pharmacie, donc, oui, oui, oui."

²⁷ Original: "C: Aujourd'hui dans la société je crois que l'image c'est, - ça reste encore, le travesti. - FJ: Mm. -

In saying "*still* the transvestite" ("ça reste encore le travesti"), it is also here the case that the evolution of the social understanding would be seen by Christophe as moving away from this image. His view is consistent with his above comments about the presentation of homosexuality in the media being "in your face" ("attrape œil"). Other than this alleged mainstream media coverage, according to Christophe, those who "know a bit better" ("qui sont un peu plus au courant") see the party atmosphere behind the image of the transvestite, and those who know even better, as in the following passage, see the couple ("the normal realationship", "une relation normale") as what homosexuality is about:

C: And actually, the people who know a bit better, [for them] it's rather the relationship, well, a couple: it's the gay couple, a normal relationship you know. Normal, well, normal in inverted commas, because, well, where is normality, where does it begin and where does it end? So, I think that mostly, in people's minds it's the transvestite.

FJ: Mm.

C: That's it. It may or may not be shocking [laughs], but I think it's the transvestite you know. I don't know if it's a positive or negative image. But it's that one. Then, for me it wouldn't necessarily be a positive image. But then, this being said, it exists, so it's an image like any other, you know. To then go on and give a value judgment, whether it's positive or negative, I have no idea.²⁸

Those who know better, according to him, see the "normality" of homosexuality. But this is not the case of society at large: the view of the transvestite, a rather negative image in Christophe's view, seems to be slightly at odds with his prior description of progressive developments. We could conclude that he believes that most people still do not have a clue what homosexuality actually is about: for him this is partnership ("a normal relationship", "relation normale") rather than eccentricism, ultimately "normality" rather than "transvestites".

Overall, some aspects of Christophe's account of social change remain contradictory: progress and stagnation, simultaneous mainstream acceptance and mainstream ignorance. The role of the *Pacs* remains explicitly undecided ("I don't know if that's an effect the *Pacs* has had or

C: J'ai l'impression hein. C'est qu'une impression. Les gens qui sont, euh, qui n'ont pas autour d'eux, d'exemple - de couple ou de personnes, euh, homosexuelles, pour eux c'est le travesti, parce que c'est ce que véhiculent les médias. - Quand on, quand on regarde des reportages ou des informations sur la gay pride, qu'est-ce qu'on voit? C'est les chars avec les travestis. Et la plume, la fête, enfin. - On va dire d'abord la plume, le strass, - et, et après quand les gens sont un peu plus au courant, ils voient plutôt la fête. Mais celui qui est dans sa campagne, provinciale et cetera, c'est forcément, euh, le travesti quoi, euh, pour pas le nommer l'efféminé."

²⁸ Original: "C: Et en fait [pour] les personnes qui sont un peu plus au courant, c'est plutôt une relation, quand tu vois, enfin un couple, c'est un couple homo, c'est une relation normale quoi. Normale, - enfin, normale entre guillemets parce que bon, où est la normalité? Où est-ce qu'elle commence, où est-ce qu'elle s'arrête quoi? Donc, - donc je crois que cette, dans la plupart des, dans la tête des gens c'est le travestit. - FJ : Mm - C : Voilà. Ça choque ou ça choque pas, mais, [rire] mais je pense que c'est le travestit quoi. Je [ne] sais pas si c'est une image positive ou négative. Mais c'est ça. - Alors pour moi ça serait pas forcément une image positive. Mais bon ceci dit, ça existe, donc, c'est une image comme une autre quoi. De là à y mettre un jugement de valeur, si c'est positif où négatif, j'en sais rien."

not.", "je ne sais pas si c'est le, l'effet Pacs ou pas l'effet Pacs"). In the light of a possible typology, Christophe's view, in a simplified reformulation, could be stated as follows :

Synthesis:

"There has been a lot of progress, with the gay mayor, with the Pacs, with greater visibility in general. The Pacs somehow is an expression of that consensus of new acceptance, maybe it has also been a motor of change to some extent. Now people seem to accept homosexuality much more broadly, but not all do. Also, many still have a distorted view of what it is about because the media also supports a view of the homosexual as transvestite and effeminate. Things need to move forward more, a lot needs to be done. And above all, in certain places, suburbs and province towns, but also in Arab and black communities, things have not changed. In my own environment, people have remained more or less open minded about homosexuality – the public debates and recent developments have not changed their views at all."

While we have looked at various contradictions and nuances in the progress view that Christophe presents here, in terms of the typologies further down in the analysis, concerning the societal question about "Social Change", Christophe will be classified as subscribing to a view that there has been considerable change towards a more accepting society with regards to homosexuality (typology: "big change"), a typology that is dominant within the sample, but not unanimous.

3.1.3. Christophe's views and the subsequent analysis

In these first two thematic explorations, in an in-depth screening of the interview with Christophe, some positions that are rather common features also in other interviews have been pointed out, which may be little surprising: the Pacs is somehow a good thing, in recent years homosexuality has become more visible and more accepted, but there are certain groups and areas where this is still not the case.

Even though slightly repetitive, as the same topic was looked at from different angles, in this first step it seemed useful to review the integrity of one respondent's answers according to themes so that the rationale of how the interviews should be screened in various passages according to themes is made explicit. Also, the formulation of typologies on the basis of sometimes contradictory normative elements has been exemplified, and the subsequent analytical steps have thereby been clarified.

Christophe's view is not atypical in how support for the legal recognition of partnership is combined with a distant approach to both political claims and personal views of marriage and partnership registration (e.g. Pacs). The societal and political discourses within the interview

narrative should also be considered in the biographical context, such as concerning relationship experiences, and the momentary position of the interview situation within personal developments. In Christophe's case, his rejection of registering a partnership personally is surely not unconnected to his partnership experiences. In particular, a frustration or disappointment characterized his ending of a long-term partnership and the feeling that Parisian gay culture (compared to Bordeaux where he had met his long-term boyfriend) would not allow for committed partnership.

C: I could discover things with him, in art, in culture, and so on, or share things with him. And what was important was that as a matter of fact we shared certain things – not necessarily about politics, but art and culture.

FJ: Mm.

C: Apart from the physical element to it, because of course, it lasted for five years, it's obvious that there was an interest on both sides. It's the whole thing. There was also the reception by his family that had been important and that certainly contributed to things having gone well. Actually, he was a bit crazy; to some extent it was because of that I was interested in him. There are moments when things are very messy. Well, I think we reciprocally gave each other things, until the day when we noticed that we didn't give each other anything at all [anymore]. So as a matter of fact, it was at that moment that we split up. [...] So after having been in a relationship for five years – it had been the first time that I was living with somebody – at the present moment – it's more than nine months since we split up – I don't see a relationship [perspective], that's clear. [laughs] Having said this, I do actually see a person who is important in my life [and] who means a lot to me, yes. Yes. Well, I hope so. Not necessarily in the same way, that's for sure, because I think that I have tried it out, well, it's not really my kind of thing. Perhaps with another person it will be different; I will see. It's true that when we decided to move in together [with my ex-boyfriend], in fact it had been him who had decided and I went along with it. So perhaps for the next one it will be the same thing. But having said this, I will think about it for longer compared to the last time, that's for sure. Well, yes, I am seeing someone [now] who [is] important, yes, important to me, even if the relationship is not [that of] a couple where we share the same roof. It will still be someone who is important for me, that's clear.²⁹

²⁹ Original: "C: Je pouvais découvrir des choses avec lui, en matière d'art, en matière de culture et cetera, ou partager des choses avec lui. Et ce qui était important c'est qu'effectivement on partageait certaines choses, pas forcément sur le politique, mais l'art, la culture. Mis à part le côté physique. Parce que forcément, ça a duré cinq ans, c'est bien qu'il y avait un intérêt d'une part et d'autre. Et puis c'est un tout. Il y avait aussi l'accueil de sa famille qui a été important, et qui a contribué certainement à ce que les choses se passent bien. En fait il était un peu fou, c'était un peu pour ça qu'il m'intéressait. Il y a des moments où ça part dans tous les sens. Bon, je crois qu'on s'est apporté des choses mutuelles, jusqu'au jour où on s'est aperçu qu'on s'apportait rien du tout. Donc forcément, c'est à ce moment là qu'on s'est séparés. [...] Alors, après avoir vécu cinq ans en couple - c'était la première fois que je vivais en couple. A l'heure actuelle - ça fait plus de neuf mois qu'on est séparé - je [ne] vois pas de vie de couple. Ça c'est clair. [rire] Ceci dit je vois effectivement une personne importante dans ma vie qui compte, oui. Oui. Enfin j'espère. Donc, pas forcément de la même manière, c'est clair. Parce que je crois pas que je suis à, - j'ai testé, j'ai essayé, bon c'est pas forcément mon truc. Peut-être qu'avec une autre personne ça se passera différemment, je verrai. Bon c'est vrai que, quand on a décidé de se mettre en couple [avec mon ex], en fait c'est lui qui a décidé et moi j'ai suivi le mouvement. Donc peut-être que le prochain ce sera la même chose. Mais, ceci dit, j'y réfléchirais plus longtemps que la dernière fois quoi, ça c'est clair. Enfin oui, je vois une personne qui serait importante, oui, importante pour moi oui. Même si on est pas en couple, il sera important oui, ça c'est évident, hein. Même si la relation n'est pas un couple où on partage pas le même toit, ça sera quand même quelqu'un d'important quoi, ça c'est clair."

This longer passage shows Christophe's emotional involvement with his ex-boyfriend and its impact on his narrative on the potentials for future partnerships. His negative conclusion about this partnership framework seems constructed as a reaction to his own experiences: "I have tried it out, well, it's not really my kind of thing" ("J'ai testé, j'ai essayé, bon c'est pas forcément mon truc.") The past relationship is described as a relationship of strong affection, with strong involvement in a *traditional* partnership perspective including living together and the inclusion of family ties ("reception by his family", "l'accueil de sa famille"), and is also described, from his perspective, as an exclusive partnership. The end of the relationship, instead, was indeed linked to the discrepancy between this image and his boyfriend's sexual unfaithfulness:

For me, faithfulness is nevertheless an important thing. Well, this being said, it isn't easy. During these five years you can't say that [...] my partner had been faithful. [...] The separation was due to that. [...] Actually, in five years he had been unfaithful twice.³⁰

The cross-references between Christophe's narratives on society and law on the one hand, and social change on the other, both show strong linkages to his personal experiences and perspectives on partnership. As far as his normative discourse in particular is concerned, a relatively distant position on legal reforms was confronted with a high emotional involvement with the definition of a partnership as relating to his past five-year relationship. These two aspects can inform one another in understanding the biographical narrative Christophe offers in his interview. Specific experiences, different normative contexts (his ideas about partnership, the Parisian gay scene, the view society at large has on homosexuality) have an influence both on his normative discourse and on his personal experiences as such, and both in turn influence each other. The aim here is not to analyze Christophe's positions and biography in depth. Instead, the deeper presentation and analysis of one interview has been important on the methodological level to point to the connectedness of the thematic contexts that we will analyze in greater depth throughout the next chapter.

While the question of partnership experiences had been brought in as a contextual narrative in Christophe's case, in the next step, the themes of life as a couple, projection into partnership, and public identity will be looked at more specifically. Here, four interviews are selected which touch upon these three themes respectively. Analytically, the presentation thereby moves from the single interview narrative to a cross-selection.

³⁰ Original: "Pour moi la fidélité c'est quand même quelque chose d'important. Bon, ceci dit, c'est pas évident. Pendant cinq ans on peut pas dire que [...] mon partenaire ait été fidèle. [...] La séparation a été dû à ça. [...] En fait son infidélité pendant les cinq ans a eu lieu deux fois."

3.2. Four respondents' narratives on the couple, projection, and public identity

In this section, four narratives on the couple are considered. Dario, Gemma, Sven and Dorothée come from the four different cities in the field. Again, it is attempted to place the biographical perspectives at the centre of the presentation of the material. The four interviews are selected as taken from both age categories, and so as to include both men and women within those age groups. Two are in longterm relationships, two are not. Two are graduates, one a non-graduate, and the other a student. The respondents selected here are not at odds with the overall sample – most elements of their narratives can also be found in other interviews, and they cover the kind of diversity the research design had been aiming at through its stratification. At the same time, they had all been selected on the basis of the “random” selection process of people who happened to be in the bars used for the recruitment process. In contrast with the biographical reviewing of Christophe’s narrative, these four form a cross-selection of the larger sample on a smaller scale. Again, their preliminary presentation here allows for a clarification of the coding into typologies in the subsequent chapters, and introduces interpretative elements that will be relevant at a later stage.

The interviews will be reviewed on the remaining three themes, with a focus on the couple: couple experience and projection into partnership, and, at least as linked to the couple, the theme of public identity. As we will see, the question of the couple is of course not one that should be seen as limited to the classical couple that would be analogous to a committed, cohabiting and/or sexually exclusive relationship such as in the traditional definition of marriage. We will first look at Gemma’s views on partnership, before turning to the narratives of Dario, Dorothée, and finally Sven.

3.2.1. Gemma’s partnership narrative

Gemma (39) is a Scottish woman who has lived in London for over 16 years, where she moved for her first job after finishing university. She started having lesbian relationships quite some time afterwards: “I didn’t actually come out until I was about thirty [...] It meant six months of getting absolutely plastered, and going out constantly. And then, I was just looking. I was sharing a flat rather than sharing a relationship with a gay man at that time.” Her relationship experiences seem structured around this “coming out” period, with only few

("straight") relationships before, several shorter relationships during that period, and a stable longterm relationship for the last five and a half years:

Gemma (London, 39)

FJ: Can you tell me a little bit about [your relationships]?

G: Well, since I came out or before?

FJ: Yes, or even before.

G: Well, beforehand I did not have really that many relationships, but then again, when you look back you think, [smilingly:] oh I can understand that, so. Had a few relation – obviously straight relationships. Ehm, when I think of coming out, I think there's always - apart from a couple of shallow periods - there's the sense there've been people around about. And [then] I met [my current girlfriend] I've been with for about five and a half years, which is a miracle for me. [...] It's a miracle for me 'cause my longest relationship before that was eighteen months. And that was another female. And previous to that, six months had been the medium, so. -

Gemma met her girlfriend through a mutual friend, and both have been living together since they moved in together five years ago, sharing a flat in Central London. In calling the length of the relationship a "miracle", shorter, six-month relationships are being portrayed as the norm. While she has had relationships with men in the past, this was limited to the time before her "coming out" and is viewed as having been an error, as it did not correspond to what she really wanted:

FJ: So since this coming out you've been only with women or ...

G: That's, yeah. I've never had penetrative sex with a man. And yeah, since I came out I would never -. I've never been with a man and never wanted to be.

Thus, in her present narrative, the heterosexual past is distinguished into the choice of casual partners (men) on the one hand, and desire ("wanted to be") on the other, which did not coincide. The explicit mentioning of the absence of penetrative sex can be read as discursively being used as a proof of the wrongness of the choice at the time, illustrating that the desire for men as sexual partners was absent and that the change of the coming out process was not a matter of changing her mind, but rather of growing coherence. The five year relationship is portrayed as a very close, cohabiting and exclusive relationship. Having jointly bought a house "in the country" just outside London, they are jointly combining the metropolitan and the rural life:

FJ: The last time you spent a day together, or one afternoon together, what did you do?

G: Eh, - well. We've actually, [laughingly:] we have become a very old to date [old-fashioned?] couple.

FJ: Yes?

G: So what do we tend to do, we eh, the last time we spent a day together we made love. And then we managed to get up quite late on, potter into town, have something to eat. And just, - . Oh, we actually had a fire! We had a fire, like a wood fire, [...] sat there and drank and talked

and read and things like that. [Our new house in the country] has a wood fire. [smiling] That's the reason. It was the first time that we had a wood fire.

Gemma's ironic tone in claiming to "have become a very old to date [old-fashioned?] couple" comes however with a very positive judgment on the achievements of the relationship. The image of jointly reading in front of a woodfire in the countryside house rounds up this definition of a happy, stable, both emotionally and economically successful partnership. When asked about sexual partners outside the relationship, Gemma clearly states that monogamy is inseparably linked to the success of their relationship:

I'm a monogamous girl. And I wouldn't like to see me having an affair, 'cause it would mean that there would be something seriously wrong in my relationship. And I would hate to think of [Jackie] having an affair because I think if we got to the stage where either of us will have an affair then it actually means for me that the relationship is over, and because to me it would come down to trust. But it doesn't mean to say that other people can't have open relationships I think. As long as two consent and can stay together and are happy with it [you can] do what you like.

The possibility of "an affair" is related to a "stage" in a relationship in which there is "something seriously wrong", and which for her would signify its end. Quite strong terms such as "hate", "wrong", "over" underline that her view of the relationship as being exclusive is essential to her understanding of a relationship altogether. She nuances the narrative with a tolerant view on other people's relationships, where the key terms then become "consent" and "are happy", but also "can stay together", the latter perhaps indicating that they might nevertheless put the workings of the relationship at risk even if "affairs" are consented to. The exclusiveness of Gemma's relationship links well with the overall narrative of their committed stable partnership, making her partner the central person in her life:

G: Yeah, I think the most important person in my life now is [Jackie], who is my partner. And then it would probably be ehm, - ouh! - I would say, on equal par, - two good friends, my mother and my brother. [The two friends] are actually two straight friends who I've met while I was in Aberdeen. [...]

FJ: What is it for you that makes your partner the most important person? [...]

G: Basically she's very loving and caring, and she's considerate, she's there for me. Ehm, she's a good laugh! [laughs] She's very enjoyable. And I can just say I think I'd be desperate if she wasn't around. But, ehm, not in that -. I suppose I need her just now, but there's also that [accentuated:] *want*: that I'll want for her to be around. You know, 'cause I know for myself I'm a survivor and I can live by myself, and if something happened I can work it myself up. But I don't want to do that anymore you know, I'm happy with whom I'm with, I'm happy with where I'm at. And that's where I want to be. -

Gemma's mentioning of her mother and brother and a close circle of friends as next important persons in her life, after her girlfriend, equally fits into the image of a close-knit relationship, embedded in an integrated social network of close family and good friends. Her partner is the

central person in her life, the person she "is with". In this terminology, there is a clear gap in the importance accorded to her relationship and the one accorded her mother, brother, and her good friends. She stresses the word "want", as opposed to "need": her happy relationship is one she could do without ("I can live by myself"), but one she would not want to give up for any reason: "that's where I want to be". The relationship is equally integrated into her family circle, as for example in the case of formal family matters, of which she gives an example:

[The family on my father's side] found out when my father died, and [Jackie] came to the funeral. [...] She was just accepted. [...] It seemed to be no problem.

The presentation of her girlfriend at the funeral seemed to come as a very natural fact to Gemma, accompanied by a certain disinterest as to the reaction of other family members ("it seemed"). She shows a similar attitude concerning the display of affection in public spaces more generally, where the impression made on others is portrayed as something she would not be interested in, and hence something she is "not really noticing":

FJ: If you are in the street with you partner, and for example you want to show affection, hug or kiss and so on. How would people react or how do people react in this situation?

G: I think if I'm in a situation whereby I'm walking down the street and want to hold my lover's hand or kiss her, I'm at that point interested in my lover, so I'm not really noticing how others react. What I would say is that there's certain situations that I wouldn't do it. Because I mean, I wouldn't do it in Greenock [Western Scotland] where I come from. 'Cause you probably get your head kicked in. Eh, - why? - 'cause it's different. Nothing more than that.

There is a certain contradiction implied in the fact that she is "not really noticing" on the one hand, and the evaluation of risk ("you probably get your head kicked in") on the other, according to the setting and the situation in which she holds her lover's hand or kisses her. Her Scottish hometown thereby does not compare to her everyday life in London, and this implicit evaluation places a sharp constraint on her behaviour ("I wouldn't do it"). In her experience, albeit seemingly directed by certain implicit judgments of the situations and places, Gemma explains that she experienced a negative comment in a public place only in one occasion - when she was affectionate to her girlfriend on a bus. This was an occasion which in her narrative however did not impress her in the slightest, and is remembered as a funny incident ("burst out laughing"):

FJ: Have you ever experienced anything negative in this sense?

G: No.

FJ: Either comments, or anything. - Be it, be it at home or in London, or ...

G: No. The only time anybody has ever made a comment was an old Irish guy. We were sitting in the back seat of a bus. Like at top, you know [...] the back end buses, you know, the old buses that you go off and on in the back? Right. Ok. So we were sitting there, and this Irishman, as we got to pass, just turned round and said: That's disgusting!

FJ: [laughs]

G: Ehm, - and that's the only thing that's ever happened to me in the past ten years. And we actually just burst out laughing.

In the description of her behaviour in public places, Gemma overall appears to be very affirmative of her sexuality. The "Irishman" who insults her is shaken off with a "laugh". In her description, *he* is the one outside the norm of mainstream society, referred to as "old" and "Irish", and the description seems to point to him as the odd figure in the bus encounter, rather than a threat to her public identity as a lesbian woman.³¹ In all walks of life, including work, family and bus rides, affirming her partnership with a woman is naturally mentioned, and "seemingly" accepted. However, when asked more explicitly about how she feels about affirming her sexual orientation as part of her personality, her narrative gives a slightly different picture, portraying it as a personal question, which is not in the foreground of her personality, using the image of "one of those things behind closed doors":

FJ: Sexual identity or sexual orientation, is it something important for you?

G: Alright, no. I see myself the person. I see myself the person I am, I'm Gemma H., I do my job that I do, and I think sexuality or preference, preferences sexually, come quite far down the line. I don't think it's, -. I think you probably got that [smiling], I don't think it's something to certify, 'cause like lots of things I think it's one of those things behind closed doors. And it doesn't mean to say that I can't have sex and I said that I have done, but you know what I mean.

Sexual preference comes further down in describing her personality or identity, or as she says: "quite far down the line". It is viewed as private, as the phrase "behind closed doors" suggests. This privacy is a notion she embraces fully, and it is differentiated from the idea of "private" homosexuality as being a shameful or hidden trait, as would be suggested by a "closet" terminology. As regards lesbian sexuality in particular, a gender specific analysis could also be invoked here, where women's roles are, within a patriarchal society, traditionally confined to the "private" sphere, which in a sense corresponds to Gemma's notion of "behind closed doors".³² At the same time, we have seen that Christophe also mentioned the role of "privacy" for the definition of his sexual identity. We will turn to this theme in greater depth in chapter 5. For now, one could describe Gemma's view as affirming her partnership and sexuality, without affirming it as an identity. As she puts it: She is first and foremost herself: "I'm Gemma H." Her description at the same time seems to point to an overall high acceptance of

³¹ Compare Eric Fassin's argument concerning the *homophobic* as representing a new form of deviance. Eric Fassin (2005), *L'inversion*, p. 162. See also chapter 6.

³² See e.g. Jeffrey Weintraub, "The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction" in Jeffrey Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (eds.) *Public and Private Thought in Practice. Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996). Also Joan B. Landes, "The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration" in Joan B. Landes, *Feminism, the Public and the Private* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 135-163).

her "difference", which is not seen as universally easy to have, e.g. in her Scottish hometown, as mentioned above.

How does she project her partnership into the future and, as far as the issue of civil partnership and marriage is concerned, how does she relate to the option of formalising her partnership? Her views here reflect an affirmation of just being herself, a negation of fitting into categories and a claim to difference. She does not like the idea of marriage or civil partnership, except as an administrative step to obtain certain rights and benefits:

G: If you take out what the financial implications might be, personally, I am not a great advocate for it [registering your relationship]. I just think, you know, marriage is marriage, and it's between a man and a woman. And I don't think you'd have to have something like that. A lot of gay people say: why can't we get married? But, to me it's like why would you want to? Can you not commit to each other? [laughing:] But maybe that's to ask them too much. I don't know. So I think, - Although, if the only way to get these financial benefits is to go through it, then I'm sure I could. I could go through a service. But [...] I wouldn't think of having any great things and big party and things like that. [...] No, I think I'd just sign it. [...] I think if I want to celebrate [Jackie] and I being together we'd rather celebrate ten years than, - you know - "oh we've got married". [...] I think, what I don't like is, it feels a bit like imitation. And that's why, you know, if marriage is there for man and woman, and actually I think we're not making our own way in right, so we have to imitate what [they] have. And that's quite depressing.

FJ: And your girlfriend what does she say about it?

G: She seems to concur with [my view, probably] because I'm [laughs] -

FJ: [laughs]

G: ... I'm so viperous [and] vociferous in the argument ...

FJ: Yes.

G: ... or discussion. So it's like: "Oh yeah." [imitating disinterested laughing sound of girlfriend] [...] She's not a great party girl. So I can't imagine her wanting a big party [laughs]. And you know, like, - . And, we were thinking of going and registering you know when Ken Livingstone set up his London Register.

FJ: Yes.

G: Err, an initial instance. But then again, it was all too much for fake, so. -

We can see various elements in her statement on her prospects of registering her partnership. Some of them seem contradictory. Signing the London Register,³³ introduced as a mainly symbolic option but for very limited rights such as for Council housing in London only, is portrayed as "too much for fake". This means that it would not have amounted to the "real" thing. Marriage, in contrast, would mean to "imitate" heterosexual couples. The result of campaigning for civil partnership, often labelled as gay marriage, is seen as "depressing" to the extent that it represents a failure to invent alternative visions of intimacy. In this sense then, she would not want "the real thing" if this were to be marriage. In portraying what "many gay people say", she seems to point to a certain distance between herself and a norm within gay

³³ The London Register exists since 2001, see <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/partnerships/index.jsp>

culture (although it is not clear how many the "many" are). At the same time, the pronoun "we" is used to refer to lesbians and gays more generally, implying that such a unified group has some meaning for her, as a political and social actor that could make its "own way". This in turn seems to imply a different approach to "identity" than the previous statements do.

It seems that, for Gemma, commitment forms the central value of a relationship, to which marriage does not add anything ("Why would you want to?"). But despite a rather negative narrative on such an option ("depressing"), she clearly affirms it on a pragmatic level: "I think I'd just sign it." A rejection of the symbolic values of marriage combined with a pragmatic stance on the benefits that it could imply has been a frequent appropriation of the opportunities the law offers. A certain distancing from traditional marriage perspectives is underlined by the suggestion that a "party" could be held on another occasion, such as celebrating "ten years" of partnership.

A continuation of close partnership combined with a network of friends is what Gemma equally gives as a perspective for older age:

FJ: [At sixty], what do you think will be important for you?

G: What will be important for me? Hopefully, [Jackie] would still be important for me. I would love for the two of us still to be together. I would like a close network of friends and – a lot of my friends are straight. But we don't seem to settle down, so, I'd imagine us all having a big nursing home together. But I don't know, I mean, basically I would like my health, happiness, be with [Jackie] and live in [the] town [...] where the house is. That would be great.

What both passages above thus show is how complex discourses on identity and the appropriation of legal opportunities are often constructed on the level of an individual's narrative. Elements of affirmation and rejection in defining sexual identity on the one hand are intertwined with appropriation and rejection of legal options to register same-sex partnerships on the other. Different connotations of what a Civil Partnership means, in this case, are incorporated in Gemma's narrative. The reinvention of new norms is underlined while legal opportunities are welcomed. A weariness of traditional images of marriage is combined with an overall life-narrative that values most features that could be used to define traditional marriage: commitment, long-term perspectives, exclusiveness, the private sphere ("behind closed doors"), cohabitation, joint property – and, in the theatrical image used here: evenings in front of a countryside cottage fireplace. Some elements in Gemma's critique of marriage could be seen as implying a feminist critique of marriage, other elements seem to point to a conservative position ("marriage is between a man and a woman"). However, yet again,

neither one is decisive when she considers the pragmatic consequences and legal benefits. The personal narrative, in Gemma's case, appears as a happy, coherent slalom through the different normative frameworks she has found herself in while constructing expectations and partnership reality, including radically different phases, and a strong sense of being, as she says, a "survivor" - a strong individual who has chosen a biographical path on the basis of choice and truthfulness to her own self, in which experiences of (imagined) violent discrimination but also of (imagined) general acceptance are intertwined: Greenock versus London.

Gemma's views and experiences thus represent an interesting case of how discussions and debates concerning the evolving norms on partnership, through the introduction of a form of partnership recognition, impact on personal beliefs and biographies - in a very nuanced, sometimes pragmatic and sometimes passionate way. In the typologies used in the following chapters, as we will see, she will be classified as far as marriage for herself is concerned in the typology "perhaps for pragmatic reasons", regarding partnership in the typology "monogamous relationship" (chapter 4) and regarding public identity as "openly lesbian to both parents and at work" (chapter 5).

3.2.2. Dario's new experiences and expectations

Dario, a 23 year-old student in Rome, offers a narrative on partnerships that is quite different to Gemma's, to a large degree linked to his age and the shorter range of partnership experiences. He clearly refers to his age when asked whether partnership rights, partnership recognition or marriage would be something he would think about.

Dario (Rome, 23)

I don't think that I will marry in church. And not in the town hall either, if things continue as they are now. [laughs] But one hopes that one day it can change, [that there] will be that possibility. Yes. But it's not yet the case that you could [really] consider it [...] because I'm young. I don't want to be bound to someone yet. [...] Not now. [...] Surely in the future yes. Yes. I wouldn't want to spend my life alone. And of course, recognition would [then] be useful.³⁴

As same-sex marriage or civil partnership did not exist in Italy at the time of interview, the considerations Dario provides for such an option are hypothetical on various levels. In this

³⁴ Original: Non credo che mi sposerò in chiesa. E neanche nel municipio se le cose vanno avanti così. [ride] Però si spera che un giorno potrà cambiare, [che ci] sarà la possibilità. Sì. Però ancora non è il caso di prenderlo in considerazione [...] perchè sono giovane. Ancora non mi voglio legare, diciamo. [...] Non adesso. [...] Sicuramente in futuro sì. Sì. Non vorrò passare la vita da solo. E certo, un riconoscimento sarebbe utile.

passage, the possibility of marrying is presented first in terms of the likelihood that the legal situation in Italy, and possibly the attitude of the Catholic Church towards same-sex marriage, might change in the future, prospects to which he attributes "hope" ("si spera") but regards as being unlikely to occur ("don't think"/"non credo"). Secondly, he considers himself too young for such an idea. However, in an abstract way, legally recognized partnership is something he considers "useful" ("utile"). A partnership commitment ("be bound"/"legarsi") is presented as an aim he projects himself into, to the point that the alternative appears to be to "spend [his] life alone" ("passare la vita da solo"). While the value given to such a formal engagement is abstract in a dual sense, it is given some explicit weight ("I wouldn't want", "surely", "of course"/"non vorrei", "sicuramente", "certo"). This view is confirmed in a later passage, in which he gives special weight to marriage, if possible, as having "more" value ("qualcosa di più") than civil partnership such as with a form of Pacs:

I haven't thought much about this. [...] It could surely be something useful. Yes. If I will find the right person, a guy, of course I will want to, for sure, and if I will commit myself to him, I will of course have to use those [civil unions as the Pacs], if [they] exist then. Or, if not, I also hope for marriage, why not? Something more that is not only a civil union, but marriage. I know that just this night, in Massachusetts they have introduced the possibility to marry. [...] So in America something is moving [forward], right? Here not yet.³⁵

When considering the concrete possibility of marriage or registered partnership in relation to himself, despite the absence of such options in Italian law, his main concern is about "finding a [the] right person". This expression can be read in the sense that such a project is something he has in mind, at least at a certain age, for which the second protagonist remains to be found. This projection into marriage seems a realistic option in Dario's narrative, and the knowledge of same-sex marriage in other countries, including for example "Massachusetts", seems to be an important factor to point to the realism of such perspectives. It thus points to the relevance of events in other countries and other polities for the individual construction of life plan narratives. The phrase "here [in Italy] not yet" ("da noi ancora no"), entails "yet" as a mere delay of developments, and points to the idea that things are bound to change and to develop in this direction – a progressive view on same-sex partnership recognition which would see all countries moving into the same direction as the avant-garde countries (the state of Massachusetts in this example), albeit at different pace. Under such a progress oriented

³⁵ Original: "Non c'ho molto pensato a questa cosa. [...] Sicuramente potrà essere una cosa utile. Sì. Se troverò una persona giusta, un ragazzo, sicuramente vorrò per forza, e se mi vorrò legare a lui, dovrò per forza ricorrere a questi [patti come il Pacs], se ci saranno patti. O se no, spero anche in un matrimonio, perché no? Qualcosa di più, che non è solo un patto civile, ma sul matrimonio. So che proprio questa notte, nel Massachusetts, hanno aperto la possibilità di sposarsi. [...] Quindi in America qualcosa si muove no? Anche se non in tutti paesi. Da noi ancora no."

perspective, it is a development which might arrive in time at least for Dario to consider this option at a later stage in his life, as we shall see again later. This discourse throws a light on the role that the recognition of partnerships beyond national boundaries can have. As other examples will show in chapter 4, there seems to be some indication of legal changes abroad which have a fundamental impact on the construction of life perspectives, irrespective of whether the legal framework applies at all.

Dario had been with a new boyfriend for about two months at the time of the interview. His boyfriend was also interviewed, but separately.

It has just started - a bit more than a month. Exactly 54 days. That was in the chat. [...] well, not quite, but very similar to the chat, through sites on which people put their profile and then you get in touch by sending mails. [...] We [then] met right here, at the Coming [Coming Out, a gay bar], we met a couple of times, and after a while - say one week, we started going out together. And lets hope for the best. Well, it had been a while that I hadn't had a relationship. My last relationship had finished last year in April. And this one started in April [this year], so it had been exactly one year.³⁶

Dario tells the story of his encounter with his current boyfriend as a three-step encounter, with two different types of gay "scenes" or "locations" being used in a complementary way: first internet sites and then the gay bar "Coming Out". For him, both serve the purpose of finding a boyfriend, as his narrative seems to indicate. The internet, with specific sites for gay encounters, served to establish the contact ("get in touch"/ "ci si contatta"), while the gay bar served as a social meeting point for their first face-to-face encounter in a gay social environment. The aim and outcome of both steps is to be finally "going out together" ("frequentarsi"), with a precise starting date, from which onwards the days have been counted ("54"). The internet plays an important part in Dario's narrative, which parallels what we have seen in Gemma's account of her "coming out" phase. In a similar sense, Dario refers to a phase in which he "tried to understand [him]self" ("ho provato a capirmi"):

At the beginning, as a matter of fact, I tried to understand myself, by talking, through other gay persons. Then, after that, I started to meet [people], not right away; after several months. And so I tried to understand myself, then I looked for friendship. Until the moment when instead I was also looking for relationships, or persons, with guys. I found - two. [...] And encounters I have had many. Twelve exactly. [laughs] [...] Encounters either for friendship, or to start a

³⁶ Original: "E' appena iniziata. Poco più di un mese. Essattamente 54 giorni. E' stato in chat, appunto [...] in un altro modo, però è molto simile alla chat, tramite dei siti, in cui gente mette il proprio profilo, e poi ci si contatta e si mandano degli mail. [...] Ci siamo conosciuti proprio al Coming [bar gay], ci siamo visti qualche volta, e dopo un po' - diciamo una settimana, abbiamo iniziato a frequentarsi. E, speriamo bene. Anzi, era da parecchio che non avevo una relazione. L'ultima mia relazione era finita a aprile dell'anno scorso. E questa è iniziata proprio ad aprile, quindi era proprio un anno."

relationship, of course, to see if we liked each other. [...] I'm just saying, because [laughs] [it's a] rather low average when many go and meet one, two or three a week.³⁷

The internet hence figures as an important element both in "understanding himself", and, at a later stage, for the socializing with potential boyfriends ("to see if we liked each other"/"per vedere se ci piacevamo"). He distances himself from what he refers to "many" others' use of internet encounters, who, according to him, have a much higher rate of encounters through the use of internet sites. In a later passage, he more explicitly distances himself from what he sees as a mainstream gay behaviour of promiscuity:

Anyway, I am looking for guys to be with, I'm not looking for adventures, I have never looked for those, they don't interest me. It's not that. Unfortunately in – well, unfortunately, not unfortunately – in the gay scene, however, many are looking for that. They are looking only for that. That's ok. It's enough to know what one is looking for. That's not a problem.³⁸

Again, here, "many" ("molti") refers to what seems to be a mainstream gay attitude, in his view, within the "gay scene" ("l'ambiente gay"). A double distancing thus takes place, first from mainstream heterosexual society, as it becomes necessary to "understand himself" in contrast to it, and second from the mainstream homosexual world, characterized by promiscuity and the search for "adventures", again necessitating a clear personal positioning ("knowing what one is looking for"/"essere consapevole di quello che uno cerca.")

While not being an "adventure", Dario's relationship is a casual one in the sense that he would not project the relationship to be moving towards living together or anything in that sense. Seeing each other in the afternoons or evenings out is how he describes the relationship in everyday life:

It's going well, very well. [...] We are quite close. [...] But we don't necessarily see each other every day. [...] But that's ok, [...] we see each other often, yesterday evening for example we saw each other, [...] we often meet in the afternoon, sometimes in the evening, even often. Or often we go clubbing, on Friday's, to Mucca [a gay club]. [...] I'm happy with this guy and that's good, we see each other, we go out together, nothing is finalized, let's put it like that. I mean, in the sense that I never, now, think of going to live with him, [...] or anything like that.

³⁷ Original: "Io all'inizio ho cercato appunto di capirmi, parlando, tramite altre persone gay. Poi dopo di che, ho iniziato a incontrare, non subito, dopo diversi mesi. E quindi ho cercato di capirmi, ho cercato poi amicizia. Fino a quando poi invece ho cercato anche relazioni o persone con ragazzi. Ce ne ho trovate - due. [...] E incontri ne ho fatti, abbastanza. Esattamente dodici. [ride] [...] Incontri, sia di amicizia, sia per iniziare delle relazioni, certo, per vedere se ci piacevamo.[...] Dico soltanto perché [ride] [è una] media abbastanza bassa quando parecchi ne incontrano anche uno, due, tre a settimana.

³⁸ Original: "Comunque cerco ragazzi con cui stare, non cerco avventure, non ne ho mai cercate, ne mi interessano. Non è questo. Purtroppo nel -, cioè purtroppo, non è purtroppo - nel ambiente gay invece molti lo cercano. Cercano solo quello. E va be'. Basta essere consapevole di quello che uno cerca. Non vedo problemi."

Right now I'm with him and that's what the present is like, that's ok as it is. – It's ok like that. [laughs]³⁹

This passage thus provides an insight into the everyday actualization of what his relationship is about, and how he differentiates between the present and a projection into the future, which is implicitly presented as an aim, where a commitment would be “finalized” (“finalizzato”). Such a perspective that would go beyond “being together” merely in the matter-of-fact present everyday life, is one he does consider for the medium term future, when asked about his life in ten years time:

In ten years time I hope that I will have graduated. [laughs] [And have] a job. And surely [to be] with a person besides me. For sure. Surely to live on my own, if it is with him, I don't know, but on my own away from my parents in any case. If in ten years time I will have been with that future boyfriend of mine for five years, then maybe – [laughs] I would also go and live with him.⁴⁰

Despite the very hypothetical situation, a close relationship (“with a person at my side”/“una persona a fianco”) is a future he very clearly subscribes to. His priority, in this passage, is to live outside the family home, a common concern for Roman students of his age who mostly live with their parents. The fact that young Italians on average live at their parents' home for much longer than young people in France, England, or Germany, represents an important factor both for how sharing accommodation with a partner and how everyday life in a partnership are conceived by young lesbians and gays in Rome.⁴¹ The possibility to then live with a boyfriend is something he considers a possibility (“perhaps”/“forse”), and as something he hopes for (“hope”/“spero”) when asked for his views on how to spend old age:

FJ: What do you think will be important for you will be 60, or 70 years old?

D: It will be important not to be alone. That's for sure. It will be important to have a partner with whom to live the old age. That's for sure. [laughs] That's the most important thing. It's more important to have a partner, I mean, my thoughts are more in favour of a stable relationship than becoming a father for example. Really because it's just materially more feasible. I mean, to have a partner and to have a recognition [of that] that's for sure, let's say, it's only a matter of time. [...] I hope to be living with my partner.⁴²

³⁹ Original: “Procede bene, molto bene. [...] Siamo abbastanza vicini. [...] Però, non per forza ci vediamo tutti giorni. [...] Però va bene, [...] ci vediamo spesso, per esempio ieri sera ci siamo visti, [...] a volte ci vediamo un pomeriggio, a volta la sera spesso anche. O spesso andiamo in discoteca, il venerdì, al Mucca. [...] Sto bene con questo ragazzo e va bene così, ci vediamo, usciamo insieme, non è finalizzato niente, diciamo. Cioè nel senso, mai, non penso adesso di andarci a convivere, [...] o cose del genere. Adesso sto con lui e il presente e questo, va bene così. – Va bene così. [ride].”

⁴⁰ Original: “Fra diec'anni mi vedo spero laureato. [ride] Con un lavoro. E sicuramente con una persona spero a fianco. Questo sì. Sicuramente a vivere da solo, se è col lui non lo so, però spero da solo fuori da casa comunque. Se fra diec'anni sarò con questo mio futuro ragazzo da cinque, allora forse – [ride] conviverei anche.”

⁴¹ And not only for students. Out of the eight Roman respondents born in Rome and whose parents live in Rome (hence just over half of the Roman sample are *from* Rome), seven (aged between 23 and 34) live with their parents. See appendix I.

⁴² Original: “FJ: Cosa pensi sarà importante per te a 60 anni, 70 anni? – D: Sarà importante non stare solo. Quello è sicuro. Sarà importante avere un compagno con cui vivere la vecchiaia. Quello è sicuro. [Ride] E' la cosa

Many of the statements on very hypothetical future plans, which remained vague and difficult to predict for the near future and for ten years' time, somewhat counter-intuitively here become views that he is "sure" about for an "old" age perspective, at 60 or 70 years of age: "That's for sure" ("è sicuro") is repeated three times in this short passage, and his being in a relationship is portrayed as being only "a matter of time" ("è solo una questione di tempo"). Interestingly, the same "question of time" is applied to the possibility of legal recognition. Here again, Dario's view implies that the national legal framework is "due" to change, a view which, as we have seen, is supported through his observations about other countries, whose example Italy, in Dario's view, seems to be bound to follow in some near or midterm future. However, this vision is equally stated in comparison to the possibility of having children, which he views as impossible, where he excludes the possibility of having children other than in a heterosexual relationship.

In public spaces, Dario is confident about showing affection to his boyfriend, and tells of one instance in which he experienced being given a "bad look":

Fortunately, I have never lived an experience of this kind [a conflict about being gay]. [...] I remember, however, once, that I was strolling around on the Fori Imperiali [main road besides the Roman Forum] with a boyfriend, hugging each other, I saw the look of a woman who passed by in a car. She had stopped at the traffic light, and we passed by. And she had looked at us with an expression quite of – superiority. Badly. That's it. [...] I saw her as she looked at us – badly. [Laughs] Definitely badly, that one. Fortunately only that, lets say, that has been the maximum experience of [stresses:] *conflict*, if you can call it that.⁴³

From this passage, two important aspects of Dario's public identity become evident. First, he has a confident public attitude concerning the affection to his boyfriend, walking along a main road in the city centre hugging each other. Second, that a *bad look*, in which he reads "superiority" ("superiorità") is something he has experienced as the "maximum" negative reaction he has experienced. The exchanged looks with the woman, in contrast to Gemma's laughter at the "old Irishman", become a contest between the normative space of the road in the city centre. While the woman expresses "superiority", thus viewing Dario as transgressing

principale. E' più importante avere un compagno cioè, il mio pensiero è più avere una relazione stabile che pensare di diventare padre per esempio. Proprio perché è proprio materialmente più possibile. Cioè, avere un compagno e avere un riconoscimento è sicuro, diciamo, è solo questione di tempo. [...] Spero di vivere con il mio compagno."

⁴³ Original. "Per fortuna, io non ho mai vissuto un'esperienza del genere [di conflitto sul fatto di essere gay]. [...] Mi ricordo però una volta con un mio ragazzo passeggiavamo sui Fori Imperiali abbracciati – ho visto lo sguardo di una signora che passava con la macchiana. E stava ferma qui al semaforo, e noi passavamo. E c'ha guardato in un modo abbastanza – di superiorità. Ecco. [...] L'ho vista che ci guardava – male. [ride] Decisamente male, questa. Per fortuna soltanto, diciamo, questo è stato il mio massimo esperienza di [accentuato:] *conflitto*, se possiamo chiamarlo così."

the norm and according to his wording probably feeling that the general social norm is on her side, he himself has appropriated the space and the expression of same-sex tenderness within it with ease and without experiencing any other form of conflict or reprehensive looks. This in turn makes the woman the exception to the rule and puts her "superiority" into doubt – whereby she becomes a marginal figure ("that one"/"questa") in Dario's account, similar to Gemma's Irishman on the bus. For Dario at least, she shows an unusual reaction and a strange behaviour in responding to his display of affection in Central Rome.

A similar conviction of "easiness" with his "being gay" is addressed when he is asked about how important gay identity is to him:

FJ: Is it important for you personally to be gay?

D: Yes. [laughs] Because I can say that in the last year I have emancipated myself quite a bit. And I nearly feel this pride born in me, [laughs] this gay pride, I mean, now I'm happy to be gay. I like telling someone that I'm gay and see what effect it has on the person. [laughs] Now I don't have problems in saying it, at least to certain people. I don't have any problem in telling it to people I don't know. The more people are close to me, the more maybe I have a bit of fear, because I simply fear the judgment of that person. Because I hope it is positive, but it cannot always be. Until now it has been, fortunately. But I don't know.⁴⁴

The ease and "pride" with which Dario describes being gay is the result of a process ("I have emancipated myself"/"mi sono emancipato"). Similar to the appropriation of the pavement on the main road, where he expresses it openly, he likes "telling" people that he's gay. In this case, again, the norm seems to be general acceptance, and rejection would be proof of particularly unusual intolerance on the part of specific people. However, it could seem strange that "the more people are close to" him, the less likely he is to address it with ease. This is also true of his parents, whom he lives with and whom he hasn't told about it. The general acceptance and ease, for Dario, is located in an abstract, symbolic social norm characterized first and foremost by people he doesn't know.

Finally, as a last element of Dario's narrative about partnership, Dario's view of a relationship is that of non-negotiable monogamy. He expresses a view similar to Gemma's on sexual exclusiveness within the partnership:

⁴⁴ Original: "FJ: Per te personalmente è importante il fatto di essere gay? - D: Sì. [ride] Perché posso dire che nell'ultimo anno mi sono emancipato parecchio. E sento quasi nato in me questo Pride, [ride] questo gay pride, cioè, adesso sono contento di essere gay. Mi piace dire a una persona sono gay e vedere l'effetto che fa a questa persona. [ride] Adesso non ho problemi a dirlo, almeno a determinate persone. A persone strane non ho assolutamente nessun problema a dirlo. Più le persone stanno vicine, più forse un po' di timore ce l'ho, perché semplicemente perché temo il giudizio di questa persona. Perché spero che sia positivo, però non sempre può esserlo. Fin'ora lo è stato, per fortuna. Però non lo so."

Well of course, [faithfulness] has to be – absolute. [...] If that's not there, if there is no faithfulness, then there is no relationship – in the sense that a relationship is monogamous. I mean, in the sense that we have to be together me and him. That's for sure. If there is another person, at that point the bases for being together are no longer there. That's for sure. [...] If one story is beginning, the other one has to end, I mean I wouldn't accept [there to be] two. [...] It has to be one story. If the second one begins, the first one has to end. [...] Of course it's ugly, but, I mean, in the sense that if a person is no longer happy with me or is happier with another person, I'm sorry, because I will be sorry about it, but I prefer that to staying in the dark.⁴⁵

His views here are coherent with the previously stated rejection of promiscuity he had described as commonplace in the gay scene. But in this passage, the definition of what a relationship is (and what it is not), is worded in universal terms (“a relationship is monogamous”/“una relazione è monogama”), albeit subsequently given from a personal point of view (“io e lui”). The definition of what a relationship would have to be like is clearly laid out and is non-negotiable in his projection into partnership. Another definition, such as open relationships, is implicitly characterized as darkness (“obscurità”), or not even considered, if darkness here applies only to not being told about a partner's affair.⁴⁶

Dario's narrative and his perspectives on the couple are marked by a normative framework of expectations, where many references are made to hypothetical situations and future plans. The different elements that constitute the hypothetical form of partnership talk are his age, which he refers to on several occasions, his only recent “coming out”, the recent stage of his new relationship, and finally the legal situation in Italy, which, for questions of marriage, partnership registration or child fostering does not at present accord any rights to same-sex couples. Often, the questions were worded in such hypothetical terms, to which, as we have seen, he nevertheless answered by giving detailed projections and plans with eloquence and ease. Despite this very hypothetical set-up, Dario includes very clear views in his narrative on partnership, valuing marriage as an ideal from of commitment and set of rights. He refers to different normative frameworks, such as the “gay scene” on the one hand, and social norms such as marriage on the other. He rejects some of the norms he identifies as common in the gay scene, particularly promiscuity. In contrast with Gemma's narrative, which was based on her everyday relationship, we can see in this case how projects and idealized life plans are built up in the interview narrative.

⁴⁵ Original: “Be' certo, [la fedeltà] deve essere – totale. [...] Se non c'è, se non c'è fedeltà allora non c'è relazione. Nel senso: una relazione è monogama. Cioè, nel senso, bisogna stare insieme io e lui. Se c'è un'altra persona, a quel punto non ci stanno più le base per stare insieme. Questo è sicuro. [...] Se una storia deve iniziare, l'altra deve finire, cioè, due non, l'ometto. [...] Una storia deve essere. Se inizia la seconda deve finire la prima. [...] Certo, è brutto, però, cioè, nel senso, se una persona non sta più bene con me o comunque sta meglio con un'altra persona mi dispiace, perché mi dispiacerà, però lo preferisco a rimanere nel, nell'oscurità.”

In the typological representation, as we shall see below, Dario will be classified under the category "yes [including the symbolic value of marriage]" as far as the question of whether he would want to marry is concerned. He is also classified as subscribing to a "monogamous relationship" and as "openly gay neither to his parents nor at work/ closet", where however the work context is not applicable to Dario.

In the next case, Dorothée (26), also talks in hypothetical terms about future plans, and refers to different normative frameworks. In contrast to Dario, however, she explicitly states that she is exploring how to accommodate her life within them, rather than distancing herself from them. The gay and lesbian scene in particular is what she thinks of herself as necessarily adapting to.

3.2.3. Dorothée's happy half-relationship

In the following review of Dorothée's narrative, we will focus on a major difference from the two previous cases, in that she is seeing a girl but does not refer to her situation as a relationship. This mirrors Christophe's recent story, which he also did not refer to as a "relationship".

Dorothée (Paris, 26)

I am not officially seeing anyone.⁴⁷

Dorothée is seeing a girl who is in a long-term lesbian relationship. She rather sees this experience as an initiation into lesbian life in Paris; her only long-term experience was with a boy whom she left after a five year relationship.

The first point of note here, similar to Gemma's case, is that her past heterosexual relationship is portrayed in differently from potential lesbian ones. As for Gemma, it is retrospectively seen as somehow a mistake of the past, situated before she realized that she was lesbian. She says, concerning her past boyfriend: "and just after [being with] him, well, I realized that it had always been girls that I preferred, just like I had thought from the very start."⁴⁸ The moment of

⁴⁶ We will return to Dario's view and his boyfriend's attitude, which turns out to stand in conflict with it, in 4.4.4. On partnership and faithfulness see also 4.4.3.

⁴⁷ Original: "Je suis avec personne officiellement."

⁴⁸ Original: "Et puis juste après lui, ben, je me suis rendu compte que c'était bien toujours les filles que je préférais, comme ce que je pensais bien depuis le début."

realization functions retrospectively, where *she* has not changed but rather her consciousness has.

In a range of interviews, situations that respondents are living through are not clearly defined as relationships. At times short love stories have not yet settled into something more permanent and at other times relationships are defined as being between "occasional lovers" and are continued on a casual basis but remain stable over time. On other occasions, respondents speak of sexual encounters or emotional ties that refer to ex-partners. In Dorothée's case, her casual relationship is portrayed as an initial "trying out" phase:

It was a month and a half ago that I started to become involved in this scene and all of that – before [I had] never [been]. And I have a half-relationship you see. [...] It's half, that's how it is, every now and then we see each other, and sometimes we get along really well. We see each other, but we are not together you know. She has got her girlfriend and all of that. [...] But for me it is like that, it is like that, you know. We are happy with it. [...] It's been just about one month. But it's just every now and then, you know, it's just once a week. [...] Let's say that it's the first shared relationship.⁴⁹

While she had said that she is with "nobody officially", she here uses the term relationship, but attributes it as being "half" a relationship ("à moitié"), and subsequently negates the partnership status again: "it's like that, [...] we are not together." ("c'est comme ça [...] on n'est pas ensemble"). Compared with the previous examples, Dorothée's narrative also differs as regards the question of sexual exclusiveness within a relationship - at least the one she is currently living through - where she accepts an unfaithful, non-committed form of a continued sexual relationship. This reflects vast differences of opinion within the overall sample, both for different ages and both for men and women. Dorothée herself however distinguishes her own view from her lover's view, who herself is betraying her girlfriend.

Well, her girlfriend doesn't know. [...] Her girlfriend is not unfaithful – absolutely not. For her, fidelity is very important, while for her [my lover] – she is much younger. [...] So it's normal. She's twenty-one and she wants to know other things, and that's completely normal. [...] Me, what I advise her [to do], but not in my own interest, I tell her that it would perhaps be better if she dumped her girlfriend in order to really live her life as a young person, to do stupid things, at twenty-one, well, to do everything she wouldn't do later on you know. But she still prefers to stay with her, and then, however, to have another life next to it. Well, that's her choice, as am telling you, everyone does what he or she likes, you know. Me, I know that I would be

⁴⁹ Original: "Ça fait un mois et demi que je commence à fréquenter ces milieux-là et tout, avant jamais. Et j'ai une relation à moitié tu vois [...] C'est à moitié, c'est comme ça, de temps en temps on se voit, et de temps en temps on s'entend vachement bien, on se voit, mais on n'est pas ensemble quoi. Elle, elle a sa copine et tout, [...] mais, pour moi c'est comme ça, c'est comme ça quoi. Nous ça [nous] va bien. [...] Ça fait un mois à peine. Mais c'est de temps en temps, hein, c'est une fois par semaine seulement. [...] C'est la première relation partagée on va dire."

incapable [of doing that]. I couldn't come home in the evening and see my girlfriend's face and having slept around with two chicks a week.⁵⁰

At a later stage she says :

For me, faithfulness, true faithfulness, that's also in the head. It would be to never want anyone else, never to be attracted by someone else. – That, for me, would be true faithfulness. In my opinion it doesn't exist.⁵¹

For Dorothée, it is a question of age whether one chooses sexual adventures or a relationship: "She is much younger. [...] So it's normal." However for her, it should be either freedom or commitment: choosing to be in a relationship thus goes in hand with fidelity. At the same time, this view appears as rather nuanced when she says: "true faithfulness [...] doesn't exist." There are some seemingly contradictory statements, where she says that she has lived through unfaithful relationship experiences, but that for her now, a relationship should be exclusive: "I have accepted many things out of love, but I won't accept them anymore."⁵² In her lover's relationship, fidelity also represents the norm within their couple, as far as the "couple discourse" is concerned, because the sexual adventure with Dorothée is not discussed. Dorothée's lover's girlfriend is thus "betrayed". In neither of the discourses described by Dorothée is fidelity in partnership to be negotiated within an "open" couple, a concept that has been absent from all four discourses examined so far.

What is interesting concerning the theme of fidelity is the superposition of sexuality, emotions and partnership construction. A comparative perspective is useful in order to situate this superposition within the range of discourses which emerged throughout the sample. In many interviews, what is striking is the weight given to the negotiation of sexual liberty within the partnership, where the rules within the relationship are most often considered as contractual agreements in which both different norms and the interest of the one partner and the other are taken into account. The respective strategies however differ greatly as far as the level at which the negotiation takes place is concerned: Does everything depend upon negotiation? Does the

⁵⁰ Original: "Ben, sa copine le sait pas. [...] Sa copine est pas infidèle, - absolument pas. Pour elle, la fidélité, c'est très important, alors que pour elle – elle est beaucoup plus jeune. [...] Donc c'est normal. Elle a vingt et un ans, elle a envie de connaître d'autres choses, et ça c'est complètement normal. [...] Moi, ce que je lui conseille, mais pas dans mon intérêt à moi, je lui dis que c'est peut-être mieux si elle laissait tomber sa copine, pour vraiment vivre sa vie de jeune, de faire des conneries, à vingt et un ans, enfin, de faire tout ce qu'elle fera pas après quoi. Mais elle, elle préfère quand même rester avec elle, et puis par contre avoir une autre vie à côté. Bon, ça c'est son choix, je te dis hein, chacun fait ce qu'il veut hein. – Moi, je sais que ça, je serais incapable. Je pourrais pas rentrer le soir et voir la tête de ma copine, et m'être tapé deux gonesses dans la semaine."

⁵¹ Original: "Pour moi la fidélité, la vraie fidélité, c'est aussi dans la tête. Ça serait ne jamais avoir envie de quelqu'un d'autre, ne jamais être attiré par quelqu'un d'autre. – Ça, pour moi, ça serait ça la vraie fidélité, à mon avis ça n'existe pas."

⁵² Original: "J'ai accepté beaucoup de choses par amour, mais j'accepterai plus."

partner need to accept? Do things go without saying? The need to negotiate stands in contrast to imported norm such as romantic love, traditional family commitment and the like. However the necessity of defining the partnership in those terms also represents a liberal partnership norm which ranges from the necessity of accepting (as one respondent, Julien, Paris, 29, puts it: "perhaps one has to accept things"⁵³) to the imposition of personal convictions or needs (Sven, as we will see below: "My male or female partners know that from the very start."⁵⁴). The negotiation of partnership will be returned to in greater depth in 4.4.3. For many of the respondents (e.g. Dorothée, Fabienne, Jacques, Olivier) norms experienced in the lesbian and gay culture underline sexual liberty as a necessity in the relationship: this assertion in itself focuses on the personal distance to this norm that has to be accepted rather than being chosen. As Jacques puts it: "The homosexual world is not a milieu that particularly promotes faithfulness in partnerships."⁵⁵ While the construction of values as agreed principles within the couple is referred to, different reference frames come into play, including in particular for many the improbability of monogamy that is seen either through individual experiences or through an interpretation of what the gay and lesbian norm is, in Dorothée's case the norm of lesbian life in Paris:

D: Myself I nevertheless think, well, I am nevertheless rather faithful myself, you know. But here, what I see around me, it's, I don't see much faithfulness around me. I have the impression that it's really very – short, very ephemeral relationships in fact. So that makes me change a bit.
FJ: Yeah.

D: And I find that – I didn't think it would be that way. [...] Well, I am telling you, I thought that it was different for the blokes, and now I have just realized that in fact the girls are the same.⁵⁶

What Dorothée evokes is the acquisition of a new set of norms which are those of the Parisian lesbian culture, which she states is very new to her. The similar traits are characteristic of how this conflict between homosexual sub-culture, "traditional" heterosexual norms and personal convictions and desires are described by lesbians and gays. Dario for example had similarly commented on the extent to which promiscuity is widespread. But while Dorothée sees herself as deviating from such a norm, she does not ideologically distance herself from as Dario had done. Rather, she acknowledges her adaptation to it: "that makes me change a bit" ("ça me fait un peu changer"). It is however noteworthy that, though having observed that "girls are the

⁵³ Original: "Peut-être qu'il faut accepter les choses."

⁵⁴ Original: "Das wissen meine Partner oder Partnerinnen auch von Anfang an."

⁵⁵ Original: "Le monde homosexuel n'est pas un milieu qui favorise tellement la fidélité conjugale."

⁵⁶ Original: "D : Moi je pense quand même, enfin, je suis assez fidèle quand même en moi quoi, - mais là ce que voit autour de moi, c'est, je vois pas beaucoup de fidélité autour de moi. J'ai l'impression que c'est vraiment très, - des petites relations assez éphémères en fait. Donc, ça me fait un peu changer. - FJ : Ouais. - D : Et, je trouve

same" as gay men ("les nanas elles sont pareilles"), Dorothée later explicitly refers to a sociological study on the topic which argues that lesbians and gays are fundamentally different:

In fact, I have read a book that taught me many things, a really good one, that's called "Understanding homosexuality", perhaps you know it? And in fact, it shows you, well, already the differences that there are between female and male homosexuality. It speaks a lot about unfaithfulness and about the number of sexual relationships. In fact it shows that men always want to fuck all the time, you know, even later, even when they are older. They continue to have that desire; while [for] the girls, in contrast, it goes down, completely. [For] the girls, between themselves, at a certain stage, there is nothing at all anymore. It continues in a great friendship. Well more than [a] usual [friendship], [there is] love, but there is no physical relationship anymore at all, after a while. I am saying after ten years for example. Whereas for the guys it continues, and there are even other [sexual] relationships outside the couple.⁵⁷

To be sure, expectations relating to norms that form the basis of the conflicts that are negotiated can also be generated by sociological works and other kinds of mediated knowledge. In other words, people might to a certain extent do what specialists say they are supposed to do. But most often, these stereotyped discourses are then easily rediscovered in one's own social environment. In this sense, negotiation of what a relationship is or should be often reflects either the norms understood as being those of society as a whole or those regarded as established in gay and lesbian culture, and thus different from broader social norms.

While her current affair is a casual and "shared" one, in the long-term, she sees this type of arrangement as "impossible":

I prefer being like I am now, that means with no one. In this case I do what I want to do. Actually I am really well like that, you see, because well, right now, it's good as it is. I am seeing someone whom I like, that's cool you know. I have no ties. But it's true that in the long-run that's impossible. What we are all looking for, I think, is really somebody [to be with].⁵⁸

Dorothée distinguishes "now" and "in the long-run" ("maintenant"/"à la longue") for her desires on partnership and her sexual/affective life. Indeed, the search for a stable relationship

que, je pensais pas que c'était comme ça. [...] Enfin, je te dis, je pensais que c'était différent pour les mecs, et là je viens de me rendre compte en fait que les nanas elles sont pareilles."

⁵⁷ Original: "J'ai lu un livre en fait qui m'a appris beaucoup de choses, un vachement bien, qui s'appelle *Comprendre l'homosexualité*, peut-être que tu connais ? Et en fait ça te montre, bon, les différences qu'il y a entre l'homosexualité féminine et masculine déjà. Ça parle beaucoup d'infidélité, et du nombre du rapport, en fait ça montre que les hommes ont toujours envie de baiser tout le temps quoi, même plus tard, même plus vieux. Ils continuent à avoir envie. Alors que les filles, par contre, ça baisse complètement. Les filles entre elles, au bout d'un moment, y a plus rien du tout, ça continue par une grande amitié. Enfin, plus que d'habitude, l'amour, mais, y a plus du tout de rapport physique quoi. Au bout d'un certain temps. Je dis au bout de dix ans par exemple. Alors que chez les mecs ça continue et même y a d'autres rapports hors du couple."

⁵⁸ Original: "Je préfère être comme je suis maintenant, c'est-à-dire avec personne, à ce moment-là je fais ce que je veux. En fait je suis vraiment bien comme ça, tu vois, parce que bon ben là, c'est bien comme ça. Je vois quelqu'un qui me plaît, c'est cool quoi. Moi, j'ai pas d'attaches. Mais c'est vrai qu'à la longue c'est impossible. Ce qu'on recherche tous je pense, c'est quand même quelqu'un."

is not universal within the interview material. For some, it seems unrealistic, or not something they are necessarily looking for. However, for most respondents, as we will see, partnership seems to be a norm of reference in one sense or another, and for the younger respondents in particular, the idea is sometimes linked to a life phase: settling down with a partner at an older age (see chapter 4.4). This seems logically attributable to her younger age but is quite different from the view expressed in Dario's narrative, who is of a similar age (23 as against 26). In Dorothée's view, it is what "we are all looking for" ("ce qu'on cherche tous"). Other values include, in her terms, the liberty to do whatever she likes ("je fais ce que je veux"), and this seems to be more important to her at present. In contrast, in projecting herself into the future, committed partnership appears as a central value she predicts will take precedence over other aspects of her life.

In turn, this commitment should, in her view, not take the form of a *life-long* commitment. She sees the Pacs as a much more realistic option for a future partnership than marriage could be (if marriage in France were to be opened up to same-sex couples). In terms of partnership registration and marriage, Dorothée argues that she has never liked the idea of marriage, either for heterosexual or for homosexual relationships; the Pacs as a "lighter" option seems more appealing to her. She describes the Pacs as a good option precisely because it is not like marriage, but more flexible:

[In the Pacs] I don't see disadvantages, because it's something that is very easy to break, unlike marriage. I've always been scared of marriage. [...] The Pacs it's a rather easy thing after all, you know. So definitely, if one day I happen to meet the right person, I'd like to do it. [...] Marriage, at the moment we can't, so I don't even ask myself that question. I've never been tempted by marriage, even when I was straight, for years, it had never been something I liked. I don't know. The Pacs seems nicer to me. Even for straights, you know. It's something I find cooler. And, I mean, marriage, it's really annoying, you know. I mean, you can stay, I don't think you can really stay with someone for an entire lifetime. At least the Pacs is a bit lighter, and it's something that is symbolic I think, actually rather symbolic, but that's good. It also gives you a reason to have a party. You can have a nice party with the Pacs. [...] It's something that shows you love someone, and that you are a couple, too. Because otherwise, in society, a homosexual relationship is not recognized as a partnership, I think. So the Pacs, after all, gives the relationship some substance.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Original: "[Pour le Pacs, des] inconvénients j'en vois pas. Parce que c'est quelque chose de très facile à détruire, contrairement au mariage. Moi, c'est toujours le mariage qui m'a toujours affolée. [...] Le Pacs, c'est quand même assez tranquille, tu vois, comme truc. Donc, c'est clair que si un jour je tombe sur la bonne personne j'aimerais bien faire ça. [...] Le mariage pour l'instant on peut pas, donc je me pose pas même pas la question. Le mariage, ça m'a jamais tenté, même quand j'étais hétéro, pendant des années, c'était jamais un truc qui m'a plu. Je sais pas. Le Pacs, ça me semble plus sympa. Même pour les hétéros, hein. Je ne parle pas que pour les homos. C'est un truc je trouve qui est plus cool. Et maintenant je veux dire le mariage, c'est trop chiant quoi. Je veux dire, tu peux pas rester, je pense que tu peux pas tellement rester toute une vie avec quelqu'un. Au moins le Pacs, c'est quand même plus léger, et c'est quand même quelque chose qui est symbolique, je pense, en fait plutôt symbolique, mais c'est bien quoi. Ça permet de faire la fête aussi. On peut faire une belle fête avec le Pacs. [...] C'est quelque chose qui montre que tu aimes quelqu'un, et que toi aussi t'es un couple, parce que sinon, dans la

Marriage is markedly debased with expressions such as "really annoying" ("c'est trop chiant") and "never been something I liked" ("un truc qui m'a jamais plu"). From the Pacs, Dorothée expects to be able to take the parts of commitment she values, out of which she identifies the "symbolic" aspect, and the possibility of having a "party". The fact that the Pacs is "lighter" and not intended as a life-long commitment, in her view, is clearly regarded as a factor: she sees the Pacs as "light" ("léger"), "easy thing" ("tranquille": calm, easy going), "easy to break" ("facile à détruire") – terms of non-commitment which stand in contrast to the panic of being bound by marriage: "I've always been scared of marriage." She does not put pragmatic reasons at the forefront, but rather sees the Pacs as bearing the "symbolic" benefit of marriage (she repeats "symbolic" twice, a term that had not been mentioned by the interviewer), of being recognized by "society". In this sense, according to her, it gives "substance" to the relationship. On the one hand, the term "substance" seems to clash with the notions of "light" and "easy to break". On the other hand, it seems to be the traditional connotations of marriage that for Dorothée are associated with being "heavy" rather than "light". Thus, the Pacs represents the better mix: a "light" "substance".

In commenting on the traditional couple displayed on family pictures which were presented during the interview, for Dorothée, the married couple on the picture from the 40s is to be blamed for the lack of choice their way of life evokes:

Here, I find that a bit disappointing because I tell myself that she has certainly not had the choice in fact. They married because they had to marry in those days. For sure. Perhaps even without loving each other or then just for a big admiration [for one another].⁶⁰

Disappointment ("ça me déçoit") is the first thing that spontaneously comes to her mind. This disappointment is then clearly linked to the absence of "choice" that she reads into the picture of such a traditional marriage. This point can be clarified further in contrasting Dorothée's account with that of another respondent commenting on the same set of photographs. Jacques (55), another respondent in Paris, gives a radically different interpretation: Jacques' comments have an overall positive tone. Reacting to the picture containing three generations of the same family, he notes:

société, c'est pas reconnu comme un couple, je pense, une relation homosexuelle. Alors qu'avec le Pacs, quand même, ça donne un peu une substance à la relation."

⁶⁰ Original: "Là, ça me déçoit un peu, parce que je me dit que, - elle a sûrement pas eu le choix en fait. Ils se sont mariés parce que, - ils devaient se marier à cette époque-là. - Sûr, peut-être même sans amour ou alors, simplement pour une grande admiration. "

Jacques (Paris, 55)

That's a real Christian family really. How many generations are there? There must be three, yes, that's it. [...] On the one hand it's traditional, there they seem happy, well, my God, so much the better.⁶¹

Dorothée's value judgement on marriage therefore tells something interesting about the way the connotations of marriage interact with the norm of the committed couple. The gap between the consensual values of committed couples and choice that appears in the range of interviews we have seen so far, as in most others, and the discourses on marriage and other forms of registered partnership can in general be approached from both angles: either the consensual values are as a whole empty, i.e. the agreement on commitment and choice are a lipservice paid to a standardly accepted discourse, or, by contrary, the connotations of "marriage" are constructed independently of the social and legal institutions themselves, i.e. the same institution has a very different meaning to different people.

Thus, marriage for example can either be seen as an institution of choice (you choose whether to marry or not, you choose whom to marry) or as an institution of non-choice (the state promotes marriage and society wants to oblige you to conform to a particular way of living your partnership and pushes you towards having a certain type of partner). Pacs, Civil Partnership and Eingetragene Partnerschaft yet again can be seen alternatively as conforming to marriage - by signing a document which establishes the partnership on a legal footing - or in opposition to traditional family norms: in being homosexual, or in the case of the Pacs, which it is open to all couples, in being more "flexible" ("lighter") and "modern", as in Dorothée's narrative.

Yet again, as we have argued, the substance of the apparently consensual norms can be questioned altogether: Is the reference to a wish to be in a stable committed partnership (at present or in future) to be counted as something substantial or as a lip-service to a norm that is easier not to dispute? Do the different value frames behind the expressed wish of the loving partnership share any substantial elements with how the partnership is to be constructed in practice, or does the "love" discourse veil incompatible differences between different conceptions of partnerships (such as could be indicated in the discourses on monogamy and infidelity)? Hence, what will be interesting in the following analysis will be the manner in which the discourses of consensus and contradiction are constructed and how substance can be

⁶¹ Original: "Voilà une vraie famille chrétienne, vraiment. Il y a combien de générations là ? Il doit y en avoir trois, oui, c'est ça. [...] D'un côté très traditionnel, là ils ont l'air heureux, ben ma foi, tant mieux."

pinned down and compared to value discourses that build a moral narrative around preferences of forms of partnership and commitment.

Dorothée's narrative is also significant in that she stands for a specific type of respondent that proved to be broadly represented in the overall sample. A large range of respondents has only recently started to frequent lesbian and gay bars in the cities where they were approached. Now, this is supposedly representative of the field that we are looking at. One can assume that the novelty which such locations represent for Dorothée, or for Dario above, combined with the search for experiences and/or potential partners, contributes to a relatively higher frequentation of these bars than for lesbians and gays in those cities for whom this novelty factor does not apply. It is therefore a characteristic that corresponds to the field that is being researched. As these two narratives have respectively shown, the search for a positioning between the different norms they are confronted with is particularly explicit for these lesbians and gays to whom the milieu itself is new: strong convictions and distancing from certain norms (distance from "straight norms" on the one hand, and a rejection of certain "gay" norms in the case of Dario) are combined with an explorative attitude to the normative context they are experiencing. Dorothée had described this through her readings of sociological books on homosexuality and her observations on her lover's relationship: "[For] the girls, between themselves, at a certain stage, there is nothing at all anymore," according to her book, and "I thought that it was different for the blokes, and now I have just realized that in fact the girls are the same," according to her recent observations. Having "realized" that she was "100% lesbian", as she says, she explores the norms she sees as prevailing in the environment which she is now frequenting and actively wants to be part of.

As we will see in chapters 4 and 5, Dorothée can be classified under the category "Yes, but civil partnership is better" on the question whether she would want to marry. As regards her views as to what kind of partnership is desirable, she will be split between the typologies "None right now" and "Monogamous ideal but not sure". Regarding public identity, she will be classified as openly gay to "neither parents nor at work/ closeted".

Finally, in this presentation of four narratives on partnership, we now turn to a respondent who juggles straight and gay norms in yet another way. He defines himself as bisexual rather than gay and criticizes what he sees as intolerance in the gay scene.

3.2.4. *Sven's open partnerships and the discrimination of bisexuality*

In considering another narrative, that of Sven, a respondent from Berlin who is 39, the same age as Gemma, we shall focus on certain differences in how he conceives of relationships and of sexual identity as linked to his partnership experiences.

As a first major difference from Gemma, and also from Dorothée, he considers his sexual identity as "bisexual", in which past relationships with women are not considered as untrue to his identity. Concerning bisexuality and views on sexual and partnership life, he considers some of the norms within gay culture as "intolerant":

Sven (Berlin, 39)

The gay community, or the lesbian one, but I can talk more about the gay one, I don't really know the lesbian one, claims acceptance and tolerance on the socio-political level on the one hand [...], as a minority group, but [is] then at the same time intolerant.

[later:]

I have many gay friends who have a problem with bisexuality, because, yes: "he does not fully belong to us, and not fully to the others", and who belongs to whom anyway? [...] [It's] more the gay friends than the straight ones [...] who somehow often have a problem with it then, which I find laughable, because there they act in as intolerant a way towards the bisexual as heterosexuals do towards the gays. And nothing is crazier [...] than the often experienced intolerance of the gay community, when you don't exactly fit in with the grid.⁶²

"Not fitting in with the grid" is Sven's view of his sexual identity when it comes to the gay scene. He judges the gay milieu as "intolerant" concerning bisexuality. Sven makes a comparison to his "straight friends" who have less of a problem accepting this characteristic. He repeatedly insists on what he sees as an oddity: that gays who claim tolerance are rather less tolerant towards "otherness" themselves. This point is raised at different stages in the interview, and Sven underlines it with expressions such as "laughable" ("zum Lachen") and "crazy" ("wahnsinnig"). While the topic is very different compared to the question of promiscuity, we can find a certain parallel here with Dario's narrative. Both Dario and Sven in their discourses struggle with norms they perceive as being specific to the gay scene: being exclusively gay, in the case of Sven's view of "gay norms", and having many sexual encounters, in the case of Dario's view of "gay norms". To what extent are their narratives

⁶² Original: "Die schwule community, oder die lesbische, wobei ich mehr eben über die schwule reden kann, die lesbische kenn ich so nicht, [fordert] auf einer Seite eben Akzeptanz und Toleranz gesellschaftspolitisch ein [...], als eben Minderheitengruppe, und [ist] dann aber [...] genauso intolerant. [later:] Ich hab viele schwule Freunde, die mit der Bisexualität n Problem haben, weil, ja: „er gehört nicht ganz zu uns, und nicht ganz zu den andern“, und, wer gehört schon zu wem? [...] [Es sind] eher die schwulen Freunde als die Heterosexuellen, [...] die damit dann irgendwo n Problem haben, oftmals, was ich einfach, ja, zum Lachen finde, weil das, äh, da verhalten sie sich dann, mir gegenüber, oder andern Bisexuellen, genauso intolerant, wie eigentlich die Heterosexuellen

compatible with the view that gay identities are constructed around a rationale of choice? On the one hand, both choose their own views on identities and formulate their expectations independently of the norms they perceive. On the other hand, they re-appropriate norms they perceive as options, either in the "straight" environment they are accustomed to or within the "gay" environment. In Sven's story, he sees this as clearly problematic, which seems to indicate that a choice-driven construction of identity against the normative framework they find themselves in is anything but easy, irrespective of whether it is within mainstream society or within the "gay community", as Sven puts it. And as we have seen in Dorothée's account, others give accounts in which they adapt to norms they have observed in the gay world. Despite his critical discourse, this was also, to a certain extent, the case for Christophe: his belief that relationships are impossible in Parisian gay circles ultimately led to a changed perspective in relation to his own norms, lifestyle and aspirations.

Sven's narrative on the discursive rejects the "coming out narrative" of the other interviews we have examined. He does not draw a line between a phase of heterosexual relationships (earlier on in his life) and a homosexual one (more recently). He has been in a relationship for seven months, on the back of four relationships which he sees as the most important from his past, two heterosexual ones, of seven and four years, and subsequently two homosexual ones of three years each. He thus considers his experiences with women and men on an equal footing. At the same time he states that he is in a phase in which he is more attracted to men:

In the past eight years I have had relationships only with men. The last affair I had with a woman was in 1998. Hence it dates back a very, very – a relatively long time. I think that I am in a phase in which I am sexually mostly stimulated by men. And that used to be different. Now it is like this. To what extent this changes I don't know, and I don't care, I would say. Whether I still won't care if it happens again, that's another matter, but in that sense I am absolutely ok with how things are at the moment.⁶³

Hence, even though there appear to be phases of attraction to both women and men, and more recently mainly to men, no "coming out" story and no move to a "gay identity" is included in his narrative, in spite of the fact that the last sexual encounter with a woman dated back five years, and his acknowledgement that he is "mostly stimulated by men". This example thereby

oftmals gegenüber den Homosexuellen, und, - nichts ist wahnsinniger [...] als die oftmals erlebte Intoleranz der Schwulen community, also wenn du nicht genau dann in ihr Raster passt."

⁶³ Original: "Ich hab jetzt seit acht Jahren ausschließlich Beziehungen zu Männern gehabt. Die letzte Affäre mit einer verheirateten Frau hatte ich 1998. Das liegt also schon sehr sehr - relativ lange zurück. Ich glaube, dass ich auch in einer Phase bin, wo ich eben sexuell dann hauptsächlich auf Männer anspreche. Und, das war vorher schon mal anders. Jetzt ist es so. Inwiefern sich das verändert, weiß ich nicht, ist mir auch egal, sag ich mal. Obs mir dann noch egal ist, wenn's wieder passiert, ist was anderes, aber in dem Sinne bin ich damit völlig einverstanden, was da im Moment ist."

highlights elements of a "coming out" discourse and alternative models of identity construction, which will be analysed in chapter 5.

A first change in Sven's sexual interest in men and women refers to an earlier stage, in which he separated the idea of relationships with women on the one hand, and sexual activity with men on the other, as the following passage shows. While already seeing himself as "bisexual", he considered homosexuality as incompatible with relationships:

In fact, from how I felt I have known that I am bisexual since I was seventeen, eighteen. But I only had the first experiences of a sexual kind with men when I was in my twenties. For a long time, [I] couldn't imagine a relationship with a man, and that is also the reason perhaps why I started so late to have a real relationship with a man. An affair yes, but to have a man at home, in inverted commas, [...] that's something that for a long time I couldn't imagine. [...] And in 1995 I fell in love with a man for the first time so much that I said ok, now you are so much in love, it doesn't matter now that you actually couldn't imagine that. [...] In this sense I am now in my third relationship with a man. They lasted three years each, and now I have been in a new relationship since the end of January this year.⁶⁴

Rather than changing from heterosexuality to homosexuality, as in the other "coming out" stories, Sven's account provides a different form of transformation in his sexual practice: moving from "relationships" with women and "sexual affairs" with men to having "relationships with men". He had his last relationship with a woman eight years ago, and his last sexual contact five years ago. Compared to many other respondents, the time lapse is not necessarily significantly different, between what could be called a "heterosexual" life and what in terms of sexual activity could be seen as a "homosexual" life. In distancing ourselves from the discursive level, we have to remember that retrospective accounts and descriptions of past consciousness are an extremely unreliable indicator of actual behaviour over time. Relationships in particular are "told" very differently depending on the moment when they are told, and particularly so when they have finished. Instead of providing an accurate picture of sexual behaviour and sexual desire over time, the discourses here provide the narratives along which the respondents construct their sexual identity over time, focusing on change ("coming out"), but also on continuity (such as in "since I was 17" or "always knew").

⁶⁴ Original: "Ich weiß eigentlich so vom Gefühl her seit meinem siebzehnten, achtzehnten Lebensjahr, dass ich bisexuell bin. Hab aber die ersten Erfahrungen, also jetzt sexueller Natur, mit Männern erst mit über zwanzig gemacht, - konnte mir lange, und das ist auch der Grund weswegen ich vielleicht so spät ne wirkliche Beziehung mit Männern eingegangen bin, konnte mir lange keine Beziehung mit nem Mann vorstellen. Ne Affäre schon, aber nen Mann im Haus, in Anführungsstrichen, [...]das konnt ich mir lang nicht vorstellen. [...] Und hab dann neunzehnhundert fünfundneunzig mich erstmalig so in einen Mann verliebt, dass ich gesagt hab, ok, du bist jetzt so verliebt, jetzt ist dir das auch egal, dass du dir das eigentlich nicht vorstellen konntest. [...] Und in dem Sinne habe ich jetzt die dritte Beziehung mit einem Mann. Die ersten waren jeweils drei Jahre lang, und bin jetzt im Grunde frisch in einer Beziehung seit Ende Januar diesen Jahres."

On yet another topic, concerning sexual exclusivity and promiscuity, Sven's account again differs sharply from Dario's and Gemma's accounts. For Sven, the necessity of a sexually open relationship is a preconceived norm which he would impose on any relationship:

An open relationship, that's clear. [...] And my male and female partners always know that from the very start. [...] But for me, an open relationship does not mean that I am necessarily intimate with other people right away. But I have experienced, also being in relationships, having contact, including sexual and intensive contact with other people. [...] I don't however tell the other one about the individual episode, but that's then agreed on.⁶⁵

Negotiation forms an important element of Sven's approach to sexual affairs with others while in a relationship. However, the negotiation in the partnership does *not* refer to the very question of having an exclusive relationship: the necessity of an "open" relationship is presented as non-negotiable and represents the acceptance of his personality. When asked, he reports having had three different sexual partners over the past two months, which includes his current partner. According to the previous narratives, his attitude towards promiscuity whilst in a relationship is both a matter of principle, in that he claims the freedom to decide on his sexual activity, as well as a concrete lifestyle. As we can see, "negotiation" can rather concern the terms on which these affairs are expressed between the partners ("that's then agreed on"). In a later passage, Sven gives a more detailed account of the negotiation and practical behaviour within his relationships:

FJ: Is that being talked about then?

S: It is not talked about to the extent that [...] not every male or female partner [is] open for that. But I say, if I live in that way and if I have that expectation about my life, I also have to formulate it openly. [...] If I am the way I am, and if I go about it openly, it can also lead to problems, but they are then completely ok. That means that I don't want to appear to someone else differently from what I am like, because then there are no bad surprises in that sense. And both men [in the previous relationships did not [want] to know anything about the single event, that was an agreement between us. Which [...] I am not really uncomfortable about, because I think that [...] this topic [...] is a very very difficult thing for many people. And then in the end it would mean pouring salt into the wound, or not only stabbing with a knife, in inverted commas, but also twisting it around inside. That means that I don't say anything about the single episode, but that is then agreed.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Original: "Offene Beziehung ganz klar. [...] Das wissen meine Partner oder Partnerinnen auch von Anfang an. [...] Offene Beziehung bedeutet für mich aber eben nicht, dass ich unbedingt intensiv mit andern Menschen immer gleich zusammen bin. Aber ich habe eben sehr wohl erlebt, auch in Partnerschaften, dass ich Kontakt, und auch sexuellen Kontakt auch intensiven zu anderen Menschen hatte. [...] Von der einzelnen Episode, erzähle ich dann nicht, und das ist aber abgesprochen."

⁶⁶ Original: "FJ: Wird das dann erzählt? - S: Es wird insofern nicht erzählt, dass [...] nicht jeder Partner oder Partnerin [...] dazu [...] offen [ist]. Wobei ich sage, wenn ich so lebe, und diesen Anspruch an mein Leben hab, muss ich ihn auch offen formulieren. [...] Wenn ich bin wie ich bin, und wenn ich damit offen umgehe, kann das auch zu Problemen führen, aber die sind dann völlig ok. Das heißt ich möchte jemandem anderen nicht anders erscheinen als ich bin, weil dann gibt's auch in dem Sinne keine bösen Überraschungen. Und beide Männer [die vorigen Beziehungen, wollten] von dem einzelnen Ereignis, das war ne Verabredung, [...] dann aber beide nichts wissen. Was [...] mir nicht wirklich unangenehm ist, weil ich glaube, dass [...] dieses Thema [...] ne sehr sehr schwierige Sache ist für viele Menschen. Und das ist im Grunde dann noch Salz in die Wunde, oder mit dem

The relative promiscuity that Sven sees as necessary for himself in any relationship is presented as a part of his identity: "I am the way I am" ("ich bin wie ich bin") and multiple sexual activity, or the freedom to have other partners, is thus presented as an integral part of his sexual identity. The openness within the relationship is therefore non-negotiable; there is no space for compromises with the expectations or needs of the potential partner. It is however interesting that the sexual freedom he advocates is accompanied by a reference to sufferance and difficulty on the part of his partners, as a "knife" wound, the metaphorical depiction of which implies further torture of the partner if the individual "episode" were to be discussed. The value accorded to sexual freedom seems, in this passage, to come at a cost, which he in turn attempts to minimize through a certain contract of "openness" and permitted or indeed "agreed" secrecy.

Sven does not have a high opinion of marriage, but would consider balancing advantages and disadvantages of marriage if children were an option, whether in a heterosexual or homosexual couple. So far however, he simply considers himself as being unconcerned with the idea of partnership registration:

The question would be a different, independently of the [kind of] partnership – and at the moment I am living with a man, if the question of children came up. That for example would for me be one of the topics that would make me first start to deal with this question at all, and to say: what actually is the point of marriage, and what does it not give you? And then, in this framework, depending on whether it is with a woman or with a man, what are the precise differences? So then I would surely look into that. Otherwise I have to say quite honestly that marriage for me is not that great a thing.⁶⁷

Sven hence sees marriage as suitable only as a framework for raising children. While this view in defining the rationale of marriage is in line with a conservative perspective on marriage, such as defended by a range of conservative parties or by the Catholic church, his overall judgment of the institution is a negative one: "not that great" ("nicht so was dolles"). Moreover, Sven does not distinguish between raising children in a heterosexual and in a homosexual partnership, as he expands upon in another passage:

Messer nicht nur zustechen in Anführungsstrichen, sondern auch noch drin rumbohren. Das heißt, von der einzelnen Episode erzähle ich dann nicht, und das ist aber abgesprochen."

⁶⁷ Original: "Anders wäre das Thema unabhängig von, von der Partnerschaft, und zurzeit leb ich mit nem Mann zusammen, wenn das Thema Kinder aufs Tablett käme. Das wäre für mich zum Beispiel eins der Themen, die mich dazu bewegen würden, mich wirklich um das Thema überhaupt erstmal zu kümmern und zu sagen, und was bringt eigentlich ne Ehe, und was bringt sie nicht. Und dann in dem Rahmen, je nachdem ob nun mit ner Frau oder mit nem Mann, was sind da die spezifischen Unterschiede. Also da würde ich mich dann sicherlich drum kümmern. Ansonsten muss ich ganz ehrlich sagen, äh, ist die Ehe für mich jetzt nicht so was dolles."

But I can also imagine raising children in a homosexual partnership, no problem at all in my view, if it is then possible without trouble. But it really is a "can", and there is fun and a wish in it, but really not a "must" at all.⁶⁸

The idea of fostering children is presented as a positive one: "no problem at all" ("überhaupt kein Problem"), "can" ("kann"), "fun" ("Spaß"), "wish" ("Wunsch") all picture it as a positive element of a potential life plan, despite rejecting the necessity of such an idea, whereby it appears as not being central to his views on future life plans.

As a whole, Sven's narrative introduces several elements we have not seen in the other four narratives presented above: the rejection of a "coming out" story, the concept of promiscuity as inherently linked to his identity, the negotiation of terms within an "open" relationship, and the definition of a "bisexual identity" combined with the difficulty of accommodating for such a characteristic in gay culture.

In the typologies of the next chapters, Sven will be seen as characterized as "Perhaps for pragmatic reasons" concerning marriage, as subscribing to an "open relationship" as far as partnership is concerned, and as being openly gay "both to parents and at work".

The four narratives that have been reviewed have been presented as a further step towards an analytical reading of the material. While highlighting the importance of the contextual reading of the narratives from the subjective biographical perspective of the respondents, a limited amount of cross-references and distinctions have been introduced. Similarities and differences both in their content and in the way in which the narratives are constructed have been pointed out. Different ways of categorizing relationships, identity and the projection into hypothetical future projects have been identified in Gemma's, Dario's, Dorothée's and Sven's narratives. In the selection of four respondents in which the four different cities were included has also served as an indication of the way in which similarities throughout the different cities but differences between the individual respondents' discourses will be treated in further analysis and also the way in which individual cultural contexts come into the analysis, including the national legal and social context in France, Germany, Italy, and the UK.

⁶⁸ Original: "Wobei ich mir eben auch im Falle eine homosexuellen Partnerschaft, hab überhaupt kein Problem, mir vorzustellen, Kinder anzunehmen, wenn das dann, äh, problemlos möglich ist. Aber es ist wirklich, - es ist n Kann, und es ist n Spaß und n Wunsch dabei, - aber es ist wirklich kein Muss."

3.3. Conclusion

This chapter, in which we have reviewed first a single narrative on views on marriage, partnership and social change and subsequently four narratives on partnership and the couple, served as an example of how the respondents' narratives are constructed around the themes set out in the study's research design. The interconnectedness of different themes and types of discourses within a single interview was highlighted, and it was shown how interview narratives sometimes result in seemingly contradictory accounts and value statements. More generally, in comparing the discourses of different respondents, this in-depth review resulted in the juxtaposition of different types of discourses. These were exemplified through the narratives of Christophe, Gemma, Dario, Dorothée and Sven, in which we could see how partnerships were defined on different grounds, e.g. "monogamous" or "open", how a range of different projects and expectations was described, and how the institutions of marriage and civil partnership were judged on different ideological grounds. We have shown how personal biographies and ideological positions were reflected within the views that were expressed.

Beyond a first description of narratives, the conclusion from this chapter is first and foremost a methodological one. We have critically examined how interview narratives can be read as coherent discourses. These can be re-organized through the use of typologies. The contextual reading has therefore provided the definition for the coding procedure that we shall apply in the subsequent chapters. Thus, the rationale has been explained that lies behind the formulation of typologies and the mode of selection of shorter examples of types of discourses in chapters 5 and 6. This was only possible through a more detailed view on a limited range of interviews, in which the focus was placed on cross-references between the themes as well as on the biographical elements of the narratives.

The presentation and analysis had been confined to a textual reading - the discourses were situated mainly within their own narratives and to a limited extent compared to the narratives of other respondents. By contrast, the aim of the analysis in the following chapters is that of synthesis on the one hand, but especially that of a more contextual analytical level of engagement with the material on the other. The following chapters will review the material which results from the interviews: on views concerning recognition, marriage, partnership and social change (chapter 4), and through a more theoretical analysis of public identity

construction, and a deeper examination of recognition and identity as social science concepts (chapter 5).

Chapter IV

Equality, Progress, Diversity

Thematic discourses on marriage, partnership, and social change.

The last chapter provided an insight into the interview material that combined methodological considerations with the presentation of the type of material gained from the empirical part of the research. In the following, discourses on social and legal recognition will be analyzed. The focus will be on normative discourses on social acceptance, same-sex marriage and partnership. Two types of normative discourse need to be distinguished here: 1) the general view on society, for example on how society on the whole has changed and whether it would be a good thing to introduce same-sex marriage, and 2) a personal view, e.g. concerning the observations and experiences in one's own social environment and one's own perspectives on partnership, marriage and parenthood. The main interest lies on the representation of legal and social change, and in the argumentation found in the same-sex marriage discourses concerning personal choices and perspectives.

In relation to the first type of discourse, the opinions on rights such as registered partnership, marriage and, to a lesser extent, parenting are analyzed as normative discourses on political goals. The analysis will distinguish between different rationales in play for example in pro- and anti-marriage discourses. It will be interesting to note the extent to which the discourses mirror political and academic debates. As will be seen, the "equal rights" discourse is the dominant discourse encountered in this fieldwork. The structure of the discourses often implies a high background knowledge of the argumentative patterns underlying debates on same-sex marriage, alongside however overall low levels of knowledge of the legal consequences of certain reforms such as civil partnership.

Thereafter, the extent to which changes are viewed as part of a general progression of society or on the contrary, as regressive in certain aspects, will be of interest. It casts a broad light at the feeling of what "space", in the sense of options in identity construction and life plans, is seen for homosexuality in society over time. The discourses on social change link in with the question of legal change; some see both as strongly influencing each other, while others see

legal and social developments in this realm as rather unconnected. Personal experiences equally play a role in the discourse on change and can be taken as an analytical tool in placing them.

In the next step, discourses on the personal attitudes towards partnership options will be looked at, i.e. the extent to which marriage or partnership registration is seen as an option for the respondents themselves. The extent to which legal options concerning partnership are embraced, rejected or appropriated in existing partnerships or for possible future relationships will be considered.

The question of how partnership is conceived of in the context of marriage or civil partnership directly links in with how partnership itself is viewed. In other words, the idea of “marriage” can be rejected either because of its connotation or because of its legal implications, but it can also be rejected because of the type of partnership it presupposes. The respondents’ discourses on partnership and sexuality will therefore be reviewed, where the question of sexual exclusiveness and sexual promiscuity will be one important example.

4.1. Should there be same-sex marriage? Normative discourses

In reviewing what opinions the respondents have on the developments in the recognition of same-sex partnership, the first observation is the prompt positive evaluation of the reforms that has been encountered. In France, Germany and the UK, developments towards the recognition of same-sex couples are seen as a good thing. Unanimously, all respondents portray the reforms as a positive development. In Italy, where no such development had taken place at the time of interviewing, similarly, respondents referred positively both to developments in other countries as well as to the political campaign for a form of civil partnership. In Italy, the French Pacs was often referred to as a model for a similar reform.¹

Most often, in the interviews, the recognition of homosexuality through the partnership status was seen as a form of social progress, an expression of an open society, or as a legal tool allowing for the protection of a partner. The discourses involving the question as to which aspects are to be judged positively on the one hand, and criticism of such reforms on the other

¹ As mentioned in chapter 1, the parliamentary debate in 2007 instead introduces the “DICO”: (“diritti dei conviventi”), see e.g. *La Repubblica* 31/1/2007.

hand are wide-ranging. Some stress the positive effect on the social perception of homosexuality. Others consider the practicalities and legal consequences for the couple. Some denounce the reforms as insufficient, others criticize their analogy to marriage which they see as an outdated institution. Nevertheless a few, speaking from a socially conservative position, are wary of opening up marriage to same-sex couples were it to include adoption rights.

Despite these important nuances and reservations, the vast majority of respondents argues that same-sex couples should have the right to marry, as the following table shows.

Should there be same-sex marriage?

	Yes ²	Yes, but some anti- marriage feelings	All rights, but not necessarily "marriage" (anti-marriage)	Yes, but some doubt about adoption	No adoption	No marriage but registered partnership ok (conservative)
B	Hans Thorsten Daniel Sven Katharina Petra	Simone Monika Nadine		Jenny		Andreas
L	Miguel Lasse Matthew Jason	Harriet Julia	Gemma Gareth Anne Owen	Mark Kevin		
R	Dario Luisa Claudia Angelo Patti	Michele Raffaele Gabriella Francseca		Marianna Antonella Bianca	Mario Carlo	
P	Antoine Dorothee Olivier Léa Christophe	Jérémy		Fabienne Julien	Jacques Nicole	

² In the table, respondents have been categorized according to normative typologies as based on what they said in the interviews, distinguishing opinions where respondents were fully in favour of the possibility of same-sex marriage with all its consequences ("Yes"), where they were in favour of same-sex marriage but expressed very critical opinions about marriage as an institution as such ("Yes, but some anti-marriage feelings"), where in a general anti-marriage position they argued for all rights to be accorded to same-sex couples but not in favour of marriage as such ("All rights, but not necessarily 'marriage' – 'anti-marriage'"), where they had some doubt about same-sex parenting or adoption rights if they were to be the consequences of opening up same-sex marriage ("Yes, but some doubts about adoption"), where they argued against adoption to be allowed for same-sex couples ("No adoption"), and finally, where from a conservative position, only an alternative institution to marriage should exist ("No marriage but registered partnership ok – 'cons.'").

In the following, different thematic and analytical aspects of the responses concerning this question will be looked at. The sections will however not follow the categories of the typologies provided in the table above. This is because different narrative and logical patterns run across the discourses that do not necessarily correspond to the typological frame indicated here. For instance, an argumentation based on "equal rights" can, as we shall see, turn into an argument either in favour or against same-sex marriage. Moreover, as noted in chapter 3, narrative arguments often provide overall contradictory analytical lines – the typologies thus need to be understood as approximations of what position the respondent defends. In the following, by contrast, a rather explanatory perspective is taken on the argumentative logic of a wide range of discourses.

4.1.1. Equal rights

As the table shows, most respondents argue in favour of according the same rights to homosexual couples as to heterosexual ones, i.e. fully opening up marriage and parenting rights to same-sex couples. The "equal rights" discourse,³ which is most commonly the underlying reasoning guiding this, is clearly outlined in the following extracts in which it is explicitly stated. The underlying rationale can be summarized as follows: we are the same therefore we should have the same rights.

Elena (Rome, 31)

I mean it is right to have the same rights as everyone, because at the end we are all equals. And we all have – the right to have things, after all, yes.⁴

In Elena's words, the equal rights discourse is very generally pronounced, simply in the sense that we all have rights to "things". In this general statement of an equal rights discourse, the "we" refers to an abstract notion of everybody, and the rights are attributed to the individual rather than to the couple, and also to a universal citizen rather than to lesbians and gays as a group.

³ We have seen several elements of "equal rights" arguments on the academic level in the literature review. Ralph Wedgwood's article is the best to quote as he refers to such an equality argument as the "fundamental argument" in favour of same-sex couples. Ralph Wedgwood (1999), "The Fundamental Argument" A summary of the argument is given on p. 225: "The basic rationale for marriage lies in its serving certain legitimate and important interests of married couples. But many same-sex couples have the same interests, which marriage would serve in essentially the same way. So restricting marriage to opposite-sex couples is a denial of *equality*." [Original emphasis]. The argument is here equally based on neutrality of the state (with reference to Alex A. Wellington (1995), "Why liberals should support same-sex marriage") – with a rather unclear argument of why this should not apply to polygamy. For philosophical shortcomings of a simple "equality" argument, see also my own analysis in F. Jörgens (2002), "Pacs, marriage, and neutrality of the State"

⁴ Original: "Cioè, è giusto avere dei diritti come tutti, perché siamo tutti uguali alla fine. E tutti abbiamo, - diritto ad avere delle cose, insomma, questo."

The consequence of this discourse that is a dominant one in the interview sample - sometimes more and sometimes less explicitly so - is mostly spelled out in the equal access to the institution that is available to couples of the opposite sex, indiscriminately and irrespective of the question of how good or bad the existing institution, such as marriage can be judged to be. When asked how she would draw the laws for the recognition of same-sex couples, Katharina describes this as "simply exactly in the same way":

Katharina (Berlin, 22)

Yes, I would make the law in exactly the same way as for heterosexual marriage. Just exactly in the same way with all rights and duties. Yes. The same for adoption right.⁵

Here, the claim is not necessarily one of being accorded rights, but to be accorded the symbolic status of being "the same", which Katharina underscores with the notion of "all rights and duties".

Miguel, originally from Spain, also refers to an equal rights discourse, which is accompanied by the repeated question "Why not?", underlining the idea of an universal undisputable logic of the claim:

Miguel (London, 21)

I think we should have just the same rights. Why not? I mean, we are not sick or anything as some people used to think. So I think it's really good. I mean why not? We are the same, no? I suppose. They say, oh, we are an open country, but then you cannot marry, or you cannot have children, or whatever. Because it's not just to get married or be a couple of the same sex, [but] as well to have the right [to] have children, and it's all that stuff. Yeah. It's not just the fact of be[ing a] same couple and have the rights of the money, one dies, the house goes to the other and blablah. It's not that stuff, it's as well to be able to have a normal family. I mean as normal as you can, being gay. [laugh]

FJ: What would the normal family be?

A: A normal family in the meaning of - could [be] able to adopt the children, [...] Or stuff like that. Have the same rights.

In contrast to Elena's general statement, in Miguel's equal rights discourse "we" appears repeatedly, referring to "gays". "We are not sick [...] as some people used to think" provides an argument both describing the previous stigmatization and for the equal status of full citizens ("we have rights") and the social capacities and possibilities to construct families ("able to have a normal family"). The necessity of equal rights for Miguel also seems to stem from the claim of (heterosexual) mainstream society ("they") that "we are an open country". If society claims to be open, the withholding of rights such as to marriage and child care would

⁵ Original: "Ja, also, ich würde Gesetz genauso gestalten, wie, äh, das der heterosexuellen, ähm, Ehe einfach Ganz genauso, mit allen Rechten und Pflichten. Ja. Genauso das Adoptionsrecht."

be seen as some kind of hypocrisy in this rationale. Miguel's slightly ironic mentioning of a "normal [gay] family" that could "adopt [...] children" and "have the same rights" is ultimately a claim to have the same status in law, but also to be viewed as "normal" by others despite some difference ("as normal as you can being gay").

4.1.2. Equal rights – as a matter of principle

A number of respondents refer to the equal rights argument as a matter of principle, otherwise raising doubts about the institutions, and distancing themselves from the claim as being important to them. Antoine for example scrutinizes the recognition of same-sex couples through the *Pacs* according to the principle of equal rights, despite his reluctance at the idea that there should be a "need to formalize a couple".

Antoine (Paris, 50)

It's obviously a very good thing that there is recognition – of whatever couple it be. Now, whether there is a need to formalize a partnership, again, of whatever kind, I don't really care. But that there should be the same rights for homosexuals [as] for the others: yes absolutely. Now, whether one should be obliged to go through a contract in order to have succession rights or, well, anything that is a bit like that, I find that a bit disturbing. Apart from that yes, it's rather positive that gays are to be considered on a par with others, well, closer to that now. That represents something egalitarian after all.⁶

For him, the reform moves towards more equality, and more precisely towards a more equal status ("to be considered on a par"/"considéré au même titre"). The symbolic recognition of status appears as a central claim. The principle of equal status and equal rights trumps over the claim for specific rights that the Antoine would require for himself or his (potential) partnership. Jérémy similarly refers to an equal rights discourse, "for the others":

Jérémy (Paris, 30)

As for gay marriage – I don't know. – I don't know. Again, I respect everyone's desires. So, if many people recognize themselves in that, why not? But – [and] there I speak for myself – I don't see myself as marrying in the sense of a ceremony with all the, in inverted commas, "tralala" of the heterosexuals. I don't recognize myself in that. That's it, you know. But then, well – it's like in any case I'm not against child adoption by gays. But for myself it doesn't suit me. I don't recognize myself in that. But then, I am in favour of it. That's it. For others I'm in favour.⁷

⁶ Original: "C'est évidemment un très bonne chose qu'il y ait une reconnaissance, de quel couple que ce soit. Maintenant qu'il y ait une nécessité de formaliser un couple, encore une fois quel qu'il soit, ça m'est un peu égal. Mais, qu'il y ait les mêmes droits pour les homos et les autres, oui absolument. Maintenant, qu'on soit obligé de passer par un contrat pour avoir les droits de succession ou enfin tout ce qui est un peu comme ça, ça me gêne un peu mais sinon oui, c'est plutôt positif. Que les gays soient considérés au même titre que les autres, enfin au plus proche maintenant, a bien quelque chose d'égalitaire."

⁷ Original: "Quant à un mariage gay, - je sais pas. - Je [ne] sais pas. Encore une fois, je suis respectueux des envies de chacun, donc euh, si y a beaucoup de gens qui se reconnaissent là-dedans, pourquoi pas, mais, là je parle pour moi-même, je ne vois pas me marier au sens d'une cérémonie avec tout le, - entre guillemets - "le

Jérémy sees same-sex marriage and adoption as something he does not identify with, something he does not see for himself. "I don't recognize myself in that" ("Je ne me reconnais pas là-dedans") marks a contrast to the idea that "we" (gays) are recognized through the right to marry and adopt, as in Miguel's discourse above. Also, the reference in this last extract is very markedly distinguished into "I", "homosexuals" or "the others" (many gays), and "heterosexuals" – the group reference is completely absent. Throughout the next two chapters we shall see how a group reference ("us" against "them") is upheld on the one hand, and how many see themselves as struggling with norms within the group, and thereby distance themselves from homosexuals at large on the other. Kevin engages with this distinction between "us" and "them" in a rather playful way, pointing to the idea that equal rights should apply to "us" as a matter of principle so that some ("they") may use it:

Kevin (London, 32)

At this stage of my life I personally don't feel I need to do that [...] with my partner. It's fine for other people to do it [...] if they want to [...] sanctify their relationship, i.e. being married in sort of a heterosexual way, [...] that's fine. And when it goes to the rights, yes, I think it's certainly right if they marry in the same circumstances as some other, you know, other people have civil ceremonies and religious ceremonies, they should have the same rights. We should have the same rights.

At the end of the extracts, Kevin repeats the equality claim in two versions: "They should have the same rights." And: "We should have the same rights." Through this, he links the political claim back to a lesbian and gay claim, rather than one that would be there only for "other people" who "want to" marry, unlike himself. The rationale then, in contrast to Jérémy's discourse, is that Kevin sees a political claim to equality in the "right to marry" which he does not feel he would need "at this stage of [his] life."

Some pronounce outright opposition to marriage as an institution, such as Julia, but still argue that equal rights require that same-sex marriage be possible:

Julia (London, 36)

Yes, I do believe that in a purely legal perspective it's extremely important that we have completely equal rights. [...] Err, as regards the actual idea of marriage, I'm not actually that keen on the idea of getting [married]. I don't have any problem with anyone else doing it, but personally I'm not really interested in getting married. I never was though, [neither] to a man. So, there's no, there's nothing in me that makes me want to get married to anybody. I don't actually believe it's a very valid institution any longer. I think society has moved on, I don't think we require marriage. If we had the legal infrastructure in place, we wouldn't need a

tralala", - des hétéros. Moi je me vois, je ne me reconnais pas là-dedans. Mais voilà quoi. Mais après, bon. – Tout comme je suis pas opposé, - à l'adoption d'enfants par les homosexuels en tout cas. Mais pour moi-même, ça ne me convient pas. Je ne me reconnais pas là-dedans. Mais après je – j'y suis favorable. Voilà. – Pour les autres, j'y suis favorable."

marriage certificate. To me it's like ownership. And I don't believe in that. I think partnership is more important than ownership. So, marriage, I wouldn't say I'm particularly, on a personal level, for it. But I wouldn't want anybody else not to be able to get married. So yes, I think it should be there for the people that want to – gay straight whoever. But personally, I don't require [it]. [...] I think, in a way, I hope it makes them happy. I hope it works for them. But personally, I don't really care if we couldn't get married. [...] I think if it makes people feel secure, and happy, and if makes their families more accepting maybe, then that's a really good thing.

This longer passage shows how equality on the one hand and the rejection of marriage on the other are intertwined in Julia's both personal and political reasoning. It shows how, throughout the reasoning, strong statements are nuanced when the perspective shifts from personal opinions to general principles and the desires of others. While she equates marriage with "ownership",⁸ she provides a list of reasons why it would be a "good thing" for some: she explicitly stresses that others should not be denied this "equal right", repeatedly referring to not having "any problems with anyone else doing it": "it should be there for the people who want to."

While the equal rights discourse is a dominant thread running through the examples we have looked at, it is expressed in different ways, either as based on individual equal rights (Elena), as an equal right for "us" to be on equal footing and be able to be "normal families" (Miguel), as equal access to the same institution, whether good or bad (Katharina, Antoine), or yet again as a right that lesbians and gays should have, despite the respondents' disinterest (Kevin, Jérémy) or opposition to marriage (Julia).

4.1.3. *It's a good thing, but ... it comes late*

While the reforms or debates are welcomed by the respondents, many point to their insufficiency. One of the critical discourses focuses on the opinion that the recognition of same-sex partnership has arrived late. Interestingly, the feeling of "being late" is not restricted to any of the countries present in the study. Hans, one of the respondents in Berlin, argues that there has been a discrepancy between the idea that Germany had been seen as "for a long time

⁸ For a debate on feminism see e.g. Susan Moller Okin. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. (New York: Basic Books, 1989): "The earliest claims that the personal is political came from those gender feminists of the 1960s and 1970s who argued that, since the family was the root of women's oppression, it must be "smashed". (quoted in Wendy McElroy. *Sexual Correctness*. (Jefferson: MacFarland, 1996), online version www.zetetics.com/mac/sexcor/marr.html. Okin views the "gendered" family as unjust (Okin, pp. 93-101). Alternatively, on a more radical position, see e.g. Kate Millet. *Sexual Politics*. (New York: Doubleday, 1970). Concerning anti-marriage arguments in the same-sex marriage debate see e.g. Bubeck (2000), *Unser Stück vom Kuchen*.

[...] more tolerant", but that the late arrival of a legal form of recognition is "sad", and "a shame":

Hans (Berlin, 47)

It's a good thing of course, and sad however, that one really had to wait for the new Millennium for it to arrive. And a shame for Germany, while for a long time we had seen ourselves as more tolerant, as a frontrunner, well frontrunner not really, I guess the Netherlands was the real trail blazer.⁹

Hans explicitly refers to the Netherlands as the trail blazer, while in Germany "one [...] had to wait". The idea that other countries were showing the way is a point that in most cases implicitly refers to well-debated earlier reforms in the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, sometimes with very precise knowledge of the different national contexts, and sometimes with vaguer or incorrect references. Similarly, Kevin in London, argues that "a lot of countries [...] have that a lot longer", without however specifying which countries he is thinking of:

Kevin (London, 32)

I just think, you know, I know in other countries you are allowed, you know, to have a marriage and basically you can have the whole ceremony. And there's a lot of countries that have that a long, a lot longer than we have in the UK.

For some, the observation that their respective country was behind in introducing legal recognition of same-sex couples is seen as a motivation for why governments or politicians started taking those measures at all. Léa, in Paris, for example, explains that the Pacs came about in arguing that politicians noticed they were "behind on these things":

Léa (Paris, 30)

I think that in France, we are always behind compared to the countries around us, on plenty of things. On the question of insemination for example, and the recognition of the homosexual couple as well. I think that we are late. But it's for everything, like for drugs, for plenty of things, you know. [...] I think that it's rather the fact that they catch up with the other countries, because we are experiencing quite a delay. So, I think it's rather that they catch up with other countries, to get to the same level, because we are quite behind on these things. So I think they've given us that, well, the Pacs, to tell us, well, us too, we have made a bit of an effort on this.¹⁰

Her wording explicitly calls this idea one of "catching up", whereby it seems as if not having civil partnership institutions is an element in the evaluation of a country's performance. In the

⁹ Original: "Find ich natürlich schon gut und schön, und traurig, dass das wirklich so, dass man erst ne Jahrtausendwende dazu abwarten muss. Und blamabel eigentlich für Deutschland, obwohl ja man relativ lange als toleranter und vorreitend, nicht unbedingt Vorreiter, Holland ist schon eher der Vorreiter gewesen."

¹⁰ Original: "Je pense qu' [en] [...] France [...] on est toujours en retard par rapport aux pays qui nous entourent. – Pour plein de choses. Ne serait-ce que pour l'insémination, et aussi, également, pour la reconnaissance du couple homosexuel. Je pense qu'on a un, on accumule un retard. Mais c'est pour tout, comme pour les stupéfiants, comme pour plein de choses quoi. [...] Je pense que c'est plus le fait qu'ils se mettent à jour par rapport aux autres pays, puisqu'on a un retard certain. Donc je pense qu'ils nous ont donné ça, euh, le Pacs notamment, pour, euh, ben pour dire, ben nous aussi, on fait un petit effort de ce côté-là."

French context, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain seem to be the most obvious references here.¹¹

Most often, the feeling of "being quite behind" can be adapted both to the legal and to the social context of the recognition of homosexuality. While Hans had seen Germany as having been more tolerant than other countries for a long time, but behind on the legal side, quite differently, in Monika's words, Germany is far behind in this respect as well. She also refers to the Netherlands:

Monika (Berlin, 38)

Take Holland, [they] are always at the forefront anyway. There, homosexuality is normal anyway, well much more normal. Well in Germany it is only beginning to be less sleazy. Well at least among younger people, and even older ones more often start to think about it and not to keep quiet about it anymore, well at least not to the same extent. Even though of course there is a lot to catch up on concerning recognition as such. Well, there are still very many who live in a very, very secret way, and I find that in itself terrible enough.¹²

In this extract, the Netherlands is (quite correctly in terms of legal chronologies) coined the "forefront", while her own country, Germany, has "a lot to catch up on" ("Nachholbedarf"). While Monika's comparisons are correct for the Dutch case, it seems that in the "being late" discourses, "avant-garde" countries are the preferred cultural references; "worse" cases are never mentioned. The narrative elements that situate the time frame of the changes in evaluating the reforms is relevant in this section as the observation of their country as "being late" discursively institutes a norm of higher acceptance that is there on some international, abstract level, with which countries have to keep up, and normative discourses reflect such an affirmative stance. The measure of standards concerning social and legal claims, under this perspective, is situated at the highest level. Monika, in contrast to Hans, sees Germany as being behind, not only in legal but also in social terms. The terms "trail blazer", "catching up" and "being behind" or "late" all reflect the idea of progress through time – that homosexuality is becoming more accepted with time. This idea corresponds to a belief in moral liberalization

¹¹ Belgium, but also the Netherlands, due to the geographical proximity to Paris, and its progressive legislation on artificial insemination, have established themselves as a reference for potential lesbian mothers. Indeed, the term "bébés Thalys" has been mentioned in the French debate about lesbian motherhood, in reference to the high-speed train link *Thalys* that links Paris to Brussels and Amsterdam. See Anne Chemin. "La famille, nouvel horizon des couples gays et lesbiens." *Le Monde*, 26/06/2005. On the Belgium debate and legal developments see e.g. David Paternotte. "Quinze ans de débats sur la reconnaissance légale des couples de même sexe." (*Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, no. 1860-1861, 2004 : 5-81)

¹² Original: "Holland oder so, sind ja da eh sowieso immer Vorreiter. Da ist ja Homosexualität sowieso normal, also viel normaler. Also das fängt ja hier in Deutschland erst an, nicht mehr anrühlich zu sein. Also zumindest unter jüngeren Leuten und selbst ältere fangen jetzt eher an, sich damit auch mal auseinanderzusetzen und das nicht mehr so totzuschweigen, also nicht mehr so in dem Maße, obwohl es natürlich noch ziemlich Nachholbedarf gibt, was die Anerkennung an sich betrifft. Also es gibt schon noch sehr viele, die sehr, sehr verdeckt, so leben, und das alleine find ich schon schlimm genug."

and modernity in contrast to traditional “backward” society. We will refer to the idea of social progress in more depth below.

In objective terms, as far as legal recognition of same-sex couples is concerned, Italy “lags behind” the other three countries involved here. But, to be sure, Italy was not always lagging behind as regards the legal situation of homosexuality, having been less repressive than the UK and Germany for a long time.¹³ However, the “being behind” discourse is particularly present in the discourses of the respondents in Rome. Indeed, a recurrent reference in all interviews in Rome is the influence of the Catholic Church and the Vatican, such as in the example here:

Elena (Rome, 31)

I think that Italy will stay behind, perhaps as much as Ireland. [laughs] I don't know. The problem is that we have the Pope, and we have an unfortunately strong right wing that is rather homophobic and I think that it will not accept [civil] unions, unless perhaps in ten years' time. So we are a bit behind in that sense.¹⁴

Respondents in Rome point to the fact of being “behind” throughout, often claiming that their country would always be. The fact that all respondents in Rome included discourses of this type in their narratives makes it worthwhile to look at the case in some further depth.

Near to all respondents see the “Catholic Church”, the “Vatican”, or “the Pope” as mainly responsible for the lack of progress in this respect. By most respondents, the Vatican is seen as powerful in influencing Italian politics in a way that would never allow for the introduction of same-sex marriage. Also, in opinion polls, despite a high acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle, support for same-sex marriage is generally indicated as being lower in Italy than in Germany, France or the UK.¹⁵ As a notable exception to the repeated reference to “trail blazing” or “avant-garde” countries, Elena mentions Ireland, as a country similarly

¹³ Homosexuality was decriminalized in Italy in 1890, while it stayed factually illegal for much longer in Germany (1967/68) and in the UK (1967). France instead decriminalized homosexuality first, just after the Revolution, in 1791. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gay_rights_in_Europe#History)

¹⁴ Original: “In Italia, penso che rimarrà indietro, forse quanto l'Irlanda. [ride] Non lo so. Il problema è che noi c'abbiamo il Papà, e c'abbiamo una destra purtroppo forte che è abbastanza omofoba e – e, - penso che non, non accetterà - le unioni, se non magari tra diec'anni, forse. Quindi rimaniamo un po' indietro in questo senso.”

¹⁵ Findings are not always coherent on the scope of this difference. In Gallup Europe 2003, favourable opinions concerning same-sex marriage were at 65% in Germany, 58% in France, 47% in the UK, and 47% in Italy as well, thus showing little or no gap, at least compared to the UK. (www.eosgallupeurope.com) Quite differently, in 2006, the Eurobarometer 66 showed Italy well behind the other three countries in this respect: favourable to homosexual marriages: Germany 52%, France 48%, UK 46%, Italy 31% (Eurobarometer 66, 2.4 Attitudes towards Homosexuality), thus showing Italy as “behind” by approx. 15 to 20%. A poll for Repubblica in December 2006 placed Italian support for same-sex civil unions at 39% (*La Repubblica*, 12/12/2006). These numbers indicate contradictory findings rather than a negative trend, as the Eurobarometer itself, in the same methodological framework, has shown a ‘positive’ trend since Eurobarometer 39, 1993.

"behind" as Italy is seen by her, displaying a high degree of knowledge in comparing advances on the matter in different countries: her ex-girlfriend had lived in Ireland for some time.¹⁶

As we have seen in the table above, this "Italian pessimism" stands in contrast to the discourses of the lesbians and gays interviewed here, whose "equal rights" discourse is largely equivalent to the one encountered in the other three cities. While the notion of "being behind" is unanimous, pessimism about the future is not unanimously shared among the respondents in Rome, as the following passage shows. Marianna, Luisa and Claudia, who were interviewed jointly, debate among themselves the extent to which optimism is realistic and what influence the Vatican would have on the political process.

Marianna (Rome, 27), Luisa (Rome, 29) and Claudia (Rome, 33)

M: But I'm optimistic. Also because I, look, I have so much confidence in the European Union. We'll have to adapt. [laughs] Damn it! [Che cavolo!] All, not all but some countries have gone further. I don't think that Italy can put on the brakes forever. Also because I see that we are getting more and more organized now, there was the meeting about the pacs, there was the pacs yesterday¹⁷, when there is...

C: It was a wedding.

M: That's demonstrations, I agree, but I see that there is more pressure. And it's more organized. And I see that also, let's say, the example of other countries could have a positive influence.

C: It will get there, but at a very slow pace.

L: That we get there. I think the important thing is that one gets to, well, that one paces, marries, but –

C: We also need a government...

L: No, we are in Italy. Theirs is also the Church in the middle. In my opinion, they are being influenced by the Church and that's it.

M: Ah come on, I'm confident that the next government will be a left-wing one!

L: The king Juan Carlos [in Spain] for example has signed for [same-sex] civil marriage. See. Here, the Pope would have to sign it.¹⁸

¹⁶ As Ireland is the only other West European countries not according any rights to same-sex couples.

¹⁷ There were several political events by associations around the Pacs at the time, including a Pacs signed at the French embassy in Rome by a French-Italian male couple that was deliberately staged as a political demonstration to claim rights for same-sex couples in Italy. (*Corriere della Sera*, 21/10/2002)

¹⁸ Original: "M: Ma io sono ottimista. Anche perché, io ci – guarda, io confido tanto nell'Unione Europea. Dovremo adeguarci. [ride] Che cavolo. Tutti, non tutti però alcuni paesi sono andati più avanti, non credo che l'Italia potrà frenare fino all'ultimo. Anche perché vedo che ci siamo organizzando sempre un po' di più. Adesso c'è stato il convegno sul Pacs, c'è stato il Pacs ieri, quando c'è ...

C: Era un matrimonio.

M: Sono manifestazioni, sono d'accordo, però, vedo che c'è una maggiore pressione. E' pure più organizzata. E vedo che anche eh, diciamo, l'esempio di altri paesi, potrebbe avere un'influenza positiva.

C: Ci arriverà, però, molto a rilento.

L: ... che ci si arrive. Credo che l'importante è che si arrivi a, un dunque. – Che pacs, sposi, ma –

C: Ci vuole anche un governo ...

L: No, siamo in Italia, c'è una chiesa in mezzo. Secondo me questi si fanno influenzare dalla chiesa e basta.

M: Ah ma dai io confido che il prossimo governo è uno di sinistra!

L: Il re Juan Carlos a firmato per esempio per i matrimoni civili. Vedi. Qua, - lo dovrebbe firmare il Papà."

The passage contains the elements noted above: the influence of other countries (as an example to follow as well as through political pressure) and finally the opposition of the Catholic Church. Progress is seen as linear and Italy thus as catching up: "It will get there, but at a very slow pace" ("Ci arriverà, però, molto a rilento"). Luisa underlines the alleged Pope's influence through the metaphorical idea that he would have to sign a new law for same-sex marriage, which of course does not correspond to any existing constitutional role at all. The optimism in Marianna's view here refers to the legislative debate opened since the governmental change in 2006, with the Prodi government proposing the Civil Unions for unmarried couples, in a reform similar to the Pacs in France.¹⁹

4.1.4. Not far enough

The United Kingdom, at the time of the completion of the fieldwork, had just introduced the most far-reaching reform of same-sex partnership rights with Civil Partnership. As outlined in chapter 1, the law accords virtually all rights that couples of the opposite sex have through marriage. However, here too, the criticism to the reform in some interviews refers both to being behind, and to the reform falling short of "equality", where equality would be defined as non-discrimination of homosexuals, but also symbolically putting gay and lesbian lifestyles on a par with heterosexual ones, e.g. by opening the symbolically connoted institution of marriage rather than creating a different albeit legally equivalent institution.

In the following extract from Kevin, who had referred to the UK having been slow in recognizing same-sex partnerships, the criticism of having less rights in a Civil Partnership is largely counterfactual, as they are under UK law indeed very close if not equivalent to the legal consequences of marriage. However, the idea that a different institution, Civil Partnership instead of marriage, is what same-sex couples can have access to, is what Kevin sees as being "kept back" from gays:

Kevin (London, 32)

We should have exactly the same rights, there's simply no question. Just because here it's a man and a man or a woman a woman, they just tried a couple relationship, you know, they've agreed to commit to each other in the way heterosexual couples have, surely they should have exactly the same rights to everything: the same, you know, tax – everything to do with, you know, your lifestyle, everything to do with what you're allowed to have, you know - your tax brackets, property, connection to property, property that you own, should the relationship split up, the same rights in divorce or separation. I think, from what I've read, it maybe doesn't really go far enough. You know, it's a compromise. It's a bit sort of like: "ok, we'll allow you

¹⁹ See e.g. *La Repubblica* 12/12/2006.

to this, I won't allow you to do that, but, at the same time, you know, you're not a heterosexual couple, so we've got to keep some things back." But I think it is also just difficult that it is, just that it's not explained enough. And whether it's just one of those things that, well, because obviously, marriage has been around a long time for heterosexual couples, maybe it's just one of those things that over time, yes, they will come more around what they're entitled to. Whereas just, you know, automatically if you get married, a man and woman get married it's just a bit sort of like yeah whatever is there, this is yours. – Whereas you would expect that as a gay couple, but it is not necessarily so.

In the case of Kevin, such criticism that "maybe it doesn't go far enough" can be read as a surprising statement, considering that he expressed no personal interest in marriage (see above). Moreover, his insistence on "the same rights" is inseparably linked to having the same status. Without having exactly the same legal options and the same status, it seems that the homosexual couple remains stigmatized, as Kevin says: "You're not a heterosexual couple, so we've got to keep some things back."

It is the symbolic inferiority to marriage that is criticized, similarly to what we had seen in Léa's discourse where she compared the *Pacs* to "crumbs thrown to a dog" (see chapter 2). Such a lack of symbolic equality is brought up by many, but by no means all who commented on the reforms in France, Germany and the UK, all falling short of opening up same-sex marriage. For others, the set of rights included in the respective partnership institutions have been scrutinized on practical grounds, sometimes with the result that *Pacs* and *Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft* are seen as insufficient in their actual legal consequences. In these two cases, the limits of both institutions had also been heavily criticized by political groups, while British lesbian and gay groups had largely welcomed the Civil Partnership Bill.²⁰

Monika thus bases her judgment on the precise legal consequences which such a step would have for her and her partner, who had seriously considered registering their long-term relationship. After finding the rights accorded in an *Eingetragene Partnerschaft* largely insufficient on practical grounds, she finds this option does not go far enough to be taken into consideration:

Monika (Berlin, 38)

The state gets more rights to interfere, but the rights that go with normal marriage, you only get a small part of them. I find it a limited victory, and I wouldn't do it like that. [...] You hardly get any advantages from it, and I find that a pity. [...] Either you marry or you don't. Everything else is bollocks. [...] As I said, concerning questions of inheritance - and there is no

²⁰ See e.g. Ben Townley. "Gay groups respond to Civil Partnership success." *gay.com*, 18/11/2004, <http://uk.gay.com/headlines/7145>

right to your partner's pension in the case of death, and, I think it's all rubbish, really. [...] Under the present conditions, as they are now? No. [...] I find it a half-way solution.²¹

The thought that it is "all rubbish" is here based on balancing advantages and disadvantages of registering a relationship in those terms. The mention of it as a "half-way solution" implies that this judgment is however also in this case linked to the feeling of inequality. A "full" solution would be equal treatment, it seems. Recognition on an inferior level, where many rights of married couples are withheld from same-sex couples, is thus potentially felt as a form of misrecognition, and this misrecognition in turn is seen as possibly worse than no recognition at all.²²

But the criticisms and the highlighting of the shortcomings are not dominant overall. Often, in the interviews in Berlin, London and Paris (as the analysis of shortcoming is not applicable to the Italian case), the fact that there is now a recognition of same-sex couples is described as positive, without criticising potential shortcomings or remaining inequalities. Yet again, often, a very positive judgment and the voicing of the lack of equal status are combined throughout the narratives, as in the case of Fabienne:

Fabienne (Paris, 55)

I only see advantages in it. [...] Yes, the Pacs is a good thing, a very good thing. [...] An ideal law, for me, would be exactly the same as for heterosexual couples, quite simply. I don't really see why we have to make the Pacs with three more or less successful clauses when any heterosexual couple can marry, can also adopt children if they can't make any [themselves]. Well, adoption is another matter. I am against it in the context of a homosexual couple. That's my view. No, I would simply like to be in the same law. We are in the same society, I do the same work, I pay the same taxes, and I don't see why, yet again there would be this discrimination: [whispering:] small rights for this and this.²³

As these extracts show, Fabienne values the Pacs, and considers it "very good" in practical terms. Thereafter, however, asked how she would conceive of such a law, she states that full equality would be necessary. An "equal rights" discourse is here accompanied by the use of

²¹ Original: "Der Staat hat mehr Eingriffsrechte aber die Rechte, die eigentlich ne normale Ehe hat, die hast du halt nur zum kleinen Teil. Und das finde ich persönlich wie gesagt nur'n Teilsieg und, äh - ich würde es so nicht machen. [...] Du hast kaum, also du hast kaum Vorteile davon, und das find ich halt sehr - sehr schade. [...] Also, entweder man heiratet oder nicht. Und alles andere ist irgendwie so Pille Palle. [...] Ja wie gesagt Erbschaftssachen und, es gibt keine Witwen oder Witwerrente und, das ist doch alles Müll. [...] Unter den jetzigen Bedingungen, so wie sie jetzt sind nicht. Nee. [...] Also das find ich ne halbgeweihte Sache."

²² Nancy Fraser coins a debate on "misrecognition" – Nancy Fraser. "Rethinking Recognition." (*New Left Review* 3, May/June 2000: 107-120). Her approach will be discussed further down, in chapter 5.

²³ Original: "J'y vois que des avantages. [...] Oui, le Pacs, c'est bien, très bien. [...] Une loi idéale pour moi, ça serait exactement la même que des couples hétéros, tout simplement. Eh, je vois pas très bien pourquoi on est obligé de faire un Pacs avec deux trois clauses plus ou moins abouties, alors que, tout couple, - hétéro, peut se marier, peut adopter des enfants aussi, s'ils ne peuvent pas en faire. – Bon, l'adoption c'est autre chose. Je suis contre dans le cadre d'un couple homosexuel, ça c'est, c'est mon regard. – Non, j'aimerais simplement être dans

examples that homosexuals contribute to society in the same way, and should therefore have the same rights ("I pay the same taxes"/"Je paie les mêmes impôts"). Interestingly, the exclusion of adoption rights is referred to in the same passage ("is another matter"/"c'est autre chose") and she says that she is personally against it. However, her statements are ambivalent, and on a political level, she is in favour of extending parental rights to same-sex partners (see typology table). The critical view which Fabienne voices against adoption brings us to the next discursive element that we can find in a range of discourses that are opposed to according equal marriage and parenting rights to same-sex couples. In the following, the rejection of homosexual parenting rights in particular is spelled out in further depth.

4.1.5. *Rights yes, but against same-sex marriage and adoption*

Sometimes, the idea of equality between a heterosexual marriage lifestyle and a homosexual lifestyle is rejected outright: Jacques for example refers to the idea of "equal rights" as "not very happy" as a term. Marriage as an institution, for him, is linked to choosing a heterosexual life and "traditional family":

Jacques (Paris, 55)

J: Me, personally, I think that the word 'equality of rights', well, it's something that does not seem - how should I say? - [a] lucky [formula]. As for the children, well, it don't see it as something [that is necessary] [...] I'm not particularly in favour of the right to adoption for homosexuals.

[Later, he was shown a picture with a 'gay wedding cake']

J: There it's really aping heterosexual marriage. I don't see that as an essential thing. [...]

FJ: For what reason not essential? For the reason because you don't like marriage or do you think that it's different, or ...

J: No, I think that, as a matter of fact, precisely, the [fact] of the traditional family is a fundamental principle ["donnée"] of society. [...] So, wanting to do as if, to me doesn't seem a necessity.²⁴

In these passages, Jacques rejects the idea of putting homosexual marriage and same-sex partnership on an equal footing. The "unhappy" formulation "equality of rights" is spelled out: homosexuals wanting to have the same rights to marriage and the family for him means "to ape" heterosexuality. In such an expression, there is a certain parallel to a feminist anti-

la même loi, on est dans la même société, je fais le même travail, je paie les mêmes impôts, et je ne vois pas pourquoi, une fois de plus il y aurait cette discrimination, [à voix basse :] des petits droits pour ça, ça."

²⁴ Original: "J: Moi personnellement je pense, le mot 'égalité des droits', enfin, c'est quelque chose qui ne me paraît pas, comment dire, très heureux. Quant aux enfants, bon, ça me paraît pas quelque chose de [nécessaire]. [...] Le droit d'adoption pour les homosexuels, je suis pas particulièrement favorable. [...] Là, c'est véritablement vouloir singer le mariage hétérosexuel. Ça me paraît pas quelque chose d'essentiel. [...] - FJ : Pour quelle raison pas essentiel ? Pour la raison que tu n'aimes pas le mariage, ou tu penses que c'est différent, ou... - J: Non, je pense qu'effectivement, justement, le [fait] de la famille, traditionnelle est une des données fondamentales de la société. [...] Donc, vouloir faire comme si, moi, me paraît pas quelque chose de nécessaire."

marriage discourse (see 4.1.6 below). However, this statement is accompanied by a very high positive value that is put on the "traditional family", as a "fundamental fact of society". To this extent, Jacques discourse is a conservative one that embraces the idea that by being homosexual, one will have a status that is not on a par with central societal values. In the same vein, Jacques also argues against allowing same-sex couples to adopt children. (The question of same-sex parenting will be examined in more depth in chapter 6, where we shall also invoke Jacques' discourse in a more contextualized manner.)

One tempting reading of the underlying discourses around partnership and gay and lesbian rights would be to draw a distinction between radical and conservative homosexual discourses, or alternatively, left and right. Smith and Windes explain these two positions by quoting to authors in the debate being faught out "within the gay/lesbian community".²⁵ In the two contrasting examples which they (Bawer and Vaid) provide, conservatives describe gay activism as misrepresenting the majority of homosexuals:

"Their goal is not to make it less problematic for homosexuals to live in stable homes and committed relationships but to liberate homosexuals-and as many heterosexuals as possible-from a world of stable homes and committed relationships into a world of sexual anarchy and political radicalism. ... [T]he great majority of homosexuals remained invisible." (Bawer 1993)²⁶

However, the same distrust of the representative validity of political claims is in turn made about conservative positions:

"Conservative gay writers often assert that "most" gays are just like their straight counterparts but for their sexual desire. By doing so, these conservative writers, the majority of whom are white and male, universalize their own identities, their desire for upward mobility, and their pursuit of admission into the status quo as the aspirations of "all" gay people." (Vaid 1995)²⁷

As becomes clear throughout the fieldwork material, these contradicting claims, both about what should be done and about what a majority of gays and lesbians think, are present in the discourses and appear in different ways. They are however often restructured in sometimes unexpected ways, or present in an overlapping manner at the same time. Also, often, unlike in the above mentioned positions, respondents deliberately refer to their own position as being a minority position within the larger group of gays and lesbians. Carlo's discourse illustrates how one's own opinion can be underlined by pointing precisely to a difference from most other gays and lesbians.

²⁵ Ralph R. Smith and Russel R. Windes. *Progay/Antigay. The Rhetorical War over Sexuality*. (London: Sage, 2000) See pp. 125-153, quotes on p. 134f.

²⁶ Ibid: 134

Carlo (Rome, 34)

As I, politically then, well ok, we have, I have a very different ideology compared to gays, I start from the assumption that in Italy, the gays have been inspired by who talked a lot and never did anything. [the left] Do you understand? And it was only a way, and a mechanism, to attract the highest number of votes. Because then, in the end actually, there has [stresses:] *never* been anything that has been recognized. And so forget about the political discourse, maybe that's better, also because we don't have the same [as his friend]. [laughs] I am maybe one of the few gays [laughs] who is on the other side.²⁸

Carlo, politically right-wing and socially conservative, sees himself as being in a minority position amongst a left-wing gay majority. "Those who talk a lot" here refer to left-wing parties. We can even see that he puts himself outside the category of "gay", by saying that "I have very different ideologies than gays do" ("io dai gay ho ideologie molto diverse"), to then however say that he is "one of the few gays on the other side" ("uno dei pochi gay dall'altra parte"). Hence, it is interesting here that he is not saying that the silent majority has conservative values. Instead, he sees them as somewhat mistaken in following political ideologies of the left; in his view a mistake which they may discover if they looked at the alleged poverty of political advances of the left. However, he later, he mentions something close to a silent majority argument in speaking of the possibility of a "serious" gay pride demonstration by gay men with ordinary jobs. Carlo, himself a teacher in a school for handicapped children, gives the images of the "feather boa" to say how disconnected the public image of homosexuality is from the "real" life of gays like himself:

Carlo (Rome, 34)

So for what reason do we have to give that example when in fact we have friends who are professors, who are surgeons, who are bankers, who are teachers. So, for what reason do we have to give that example? I mean in the mornings I don't go to school with high heels and the feather boa around my neck. So lets have a gay pride that makes sense. [...] I have never taken part in a gay pride. But not because - you know, I don't have fun there, because then at the end I happened to go there. Obviously after the demonstrations that they made, [on the same day] I happened to see them afterwards. But, I mean, for what reason, on that day of the demonstration, do they all have to act stupidly? That means I have seen really stupid people, whom I know and who are not stupid, acting in a stupid way. So why do you do it? You are not like that. Act as you really are. You are a man, you are a woman. You are a person who in any case is worth something in society. Show what you are worth. You don't need extremisms to say "I'm gay". Because anyway in everyday life you don't do it. So lets have a gay pride that makes sense and not with theme charts of the Rio carnival type, come on. [laughs]²⁹

²⁷ Ibid: 135

²⁸ Original: "Siccome io, politicamente poi, va be', abbiamo, io ho, dai gay ho ideologie molto diverse, parto dal presupposto che in Italia, i gay si sono ispirati da chi ha parlato molto e non ha fatto mai niente. Capisci? E è stato soltanto un modo, e un meccanismo per accaparrarsi il maggior numero possibile di voti. Perché poi alla fine di fatto, non c'è [accentuato:] mai - stato - niente - di [ri-?] conosciuto. E quindi, - lasciamo perdere il discorso politico, forse è meglio, anche perché non è condiviso. [ride] Io forse sono uno dei pochi gay [ride], dall'altra parte."

²⁹ Original: "Allora per quale motivo dobbiamo dare quest'esempio quando poi alla fine abbiamo - amici che sono professori, che sono chirurghi, che sono bancari, che sono ingegneri, che sono insegnanti. Allora, per quale motivo dobbiamo dare quest'esempio? Cioè io la mattina non vado a scuola con i tacchi alti e il boa di struzzo

Carlo's claim in this passage is much closer to the one in Bower's statement, pointing to the "seriousness" of many gays by listing professional occupations: "who are professors, who are surgeons, who are bankers, who are teachers". Events such as the gay pride, according to him then provide an inaccurate picture: "You are not like that." ("Non sei così"). The picture of homosexuality that is refuted by Carlo is similar to Christophe's view which we saw in chapter 3, that for him the "transvestite" is still the dominant image of homosexuality - and somewhat unfortunately so. And both claim that the problem with it ("feather boa", "transvestite") is that it provides a false representation, that gays, in fact, are "normal couples" (Christophe), and "surgeons" and "bankers" (Carlo). These "images" constitute a normative battleground and apply both to society at large and to the homosexual milieu - where the effeminate image can of course also be valued, and which allegedly used to be embraced to a greater extent in the past, as Chauncey's observations about "fairies" in New York suggest.³⁰ The role of images will be returned to in greater depth in chapter 6. But it becomes clear that images and opinions are a normative battleground within the gay and lesbian milieu that we are looking at, where the question of "misrepresentation" is one that implies an opinion about what representations are "better" than others.

Differences in opinions, here again about homosexual parenting, are sometimes explicitly stated: when asked about diverging positions on lesbian and gay lifestyle choices and future plans, Marianna and Claudia point to the question of child care, saying that many are opposed to granting adoption rights to same-sex couples. Their analysis is therefore diametrically opposed to that of Carlo, as they see most of them as being more conservative in this respect than they are themselves:

Marianna (Rome, 27) and Claudia (Rome, 29)

FJ: Do you think that maybe your gay friends, guys and girls, [...] have the same opinion about how to live your life, also for example about these imaginations in ten years time, how to live, how to be in a partnership and so on? Or are there differences?

E: There are differences. Some for example don't want children. They are against it. They are against it because they think of the good of the child. Look I've heard this one more than once.

intorno al collo. Allora facciamo un gay pride che abbia un senso. [...] Io non ho mai partecipato a un gay pride. Ma non perché - eh, non mi diverto, perché poi alla fine mi è capitato di andarci. Ovviamente dopo le - le varie manifestazioni che hanno fatto fatto diciamo nel giorno lì, mi è capitato di frequentarli dopo. Però, voglio dire, per quale motivo, in quel giorno della manifestazione, tutti devono essere così idioti. Cioè, io ho visto persone veramente stupide, che conosco e che non sono stupidi, comportarsi in maniera stupida. Allora perché lo fai? Non sei così. Comportati come sei realmente. Tu sei un uomo, sei una donna. Sei una persona che comunque nella società vale e conta qualcosa. Fai vedere quello che vali. Non hai bisogno di estremismi per dire sono gay. Perché comunque durante la vita di tutti giorni non lo fai. Allora facciamo un gay pride che abbia un senso. E non coi carri allegorici tipo carnevale di Rio, dai. [ride]"

³⁰ See Chauncey on "fairies" and "trade".

They are against having children, but many agree on the Pacs. [...] Some say that, I mean, they agree that one can decide whether to adopt or not, so that there'd still be a law that permits [it]. But they wouldn't use it because they are against it, because they think of the psychological good [benefit], of the well-being of the child. They think it would not be the best environment for a child [to be in] a gay family. In contact with a hostile society as a matter of fact.

M: Then they say, ok, you also have a father and a mother, don't you? So perhaps [it's difficult for the children] who have two mothers, two fathers, also then starting school, no?

E: Yes.³¹

Quite differently, but equally from a "conservative" position, one interviewee in Berlin, Andreas, distances himself from gay rights claims, but because he feels that they have nothing more to complain about: he argues that he feels that claims to more rights and the painting of homosexuals as being marginal and discriminated against are no longer valid. After the end of the recorded interview (based on notes) he says that gays and lesbians really are no marginal group ("Randgruppe") any longer, and that he does not understand those who talk about ongoing discrimination today. It can be nice to be marginal, but in Berlin, it is not the case at all, according to him. On the Berlin gay parade (Christopher Street Day) for example, he doesn't understand claims that "more" should be done.

If a distinction into "left" and "right" were applied to the sample here (as Carlo explicitly does), the conservative discourses seem to be a minority position. Respondents were also asked about their political orientation at the end of the interviews, alongside various other personal details. Five respondents described themselves as rather right-wing, and a vast majority as left-wing (35), with some seeing themselves as in the centre or apolitical (7).³² As we have said in the methodological considerations about the sample and the results, two aspects need to be taken into account when reviewing such findings. First, the result reflects the café and bar milieu, and second, it is not to be considered as representative even within this milieu. A first assumption could refer to a lesbian and gay bar scene as tending towards a more left-wing or radical identity, as compared to more hidden homosexuals, who might frequent

³¹ Original: "FJ: Pensate che magari i vostri amici gay, ragazzi, ragazze, [...] hanno gli stessi opinioni sul come vivere la vita, anche per esempio questi immagini fra diec'anni come stare in coppia et cetera. O ci sono delle differenze? - E: Ci sono delle differenze. Alcuni per esempio non vogliono bambini. Sono contrari. Sono contrari perché pensano al bene del bambino. Guarda l'ho sentito dire più di una volta questo. Sono contrari ad avere bambini, ma molti sono d'accordo sul Pacs. [...] Alcuni dicono che, cioè sono favorevole al fatto che si possa decidere se adottare o meno. Quindi che ci sia comunque una legge che permetta. Però loro non ne farebbero ricorso, perché sono contrari, perché pensano al bene proprio psicologico, al benessere del bambino. Credono che non sia l'ambiente migliore per un bambino, quello di una famiglia gay - al contatto con una società infatti ostile. - M: Poi dicono, va be', ma anche tu hai un padre, una madre, no? Quindi, forse [è difficile per i bambini] che hanno due madre, due papà, eh, -. Anche poi cominciando la scuola no? - E: Sì."

³² Berlin: 9 left, 1 centre, 1 right. London: 7 left, 3 centre, 2 no answer, 0 right. Paris: 11 left, 1 no answer, 1 right. Rome: 11 left, 3 right. As we can see, Rome is the most polarized in this sample, and London the one with the strongest proportion of those who do not subscribe to left or right and a complete absence of right-wing identification. But in all four cities a clear majority identifies as left-wing: from 58% (London, lowest) to 90% (Berlin, highest).

the internet, saunas, clubs and so on, but bars to a lesser extent. And yet again, despite a high response rate in the sampling process, even small rates of refusals could be expected to be more likely to come from those who are less interested in the topic of the interview. Instead, respondents who identify with political claims for further recognition of homosexuality, associated with left-wing discourses, are more likely to feel supportive of the research topic and will be more willing to participate. This is why, rather than speculating on the numbers or proportional occurrence of discourses, it is the type of discourses and the way that they are constructed that is of interest here. This is equally true for the anti-marriage discourse, which will be looked at in the following.

4.1.6. Anti-marriage

Finally, on the other side of the spectrum, an anti-marriage discourse has often been associated with a left-wing position and with a specific feminist discourse that sees marriage as an unjust institution, as we have mentioned before.³³ We have seen some elements of anti-marriage positions above, when a number of respondents embraced an equal rights discourse despite their personal reservations about marriage as an institution. A limited number of respondents argued on those grounds that marriage would not be a good institution to have for same-sex couples. For Owen for example, marriage “should be dropped”:

Owen (London, 26)

The marriage thing, I think that should be dropped, and left behind. I don't think you can transfer – that sort of old, the whole value thing – attached to heterosexual marriage and all its history onto homosexual couples.

Owen refers to the “history” and “value” attached to marriage, which is thereby clearly situated as linked to the past (“old”), and should be “left behind”. “Transferring” heterosexual marriage onto “homosexual couples” is inappropriate according to Owen, and according to the description of marriage as old-fashioned, it seems altogether highly undesirable.

We saw a similar position in Gemma's narrative in chapter 3, who had argued that copying heterosexual norms was unappealing. Very similarly, Simone claims that those couples who would like to marry should, despite her view that the privileges of marriage should be abolished. In contrast to Gemma, Simone produces a unified and reflected political discourse:

³³ Feminist anti-marriage discourses are of course not the only feminist discourses on the matter. Neither is “feminist” here meant to refer to women's discourses only – instead it is a specific type of discourse that can be described along those lines, that associates traditional marriage with unjust gender roles.

Simone (Berlin, 43)

So, principally I think that when lesbian or gay partners want to marry, they should after all be able to do it. But fundamentally I am against [legally] favouring marriage over any other partnerships.³⁴

Her view parallels the anti-marriage positions voiced in Germany, and particularly in Berlin, during the gay-marriage debate.³⁵ Simone's "very fundamental" opposition to the privileges of marriage is central to her overall discourse, as can be underlined by the fact that this passage stands at the very beginning of the interview situation. Her support for the legal reform (referred to as marriage, although it factually is neither equivalent to nor named marriage) is limited to what sounds like a tolerant position: "if [they] want to marry, they should be able to do it." In the following she distances herself further from a political claim to same-sex marriage:

Simone (Berlin, 43)

I don't find it in principal bad if they can marry, but I don't see a special reason to fight for that, or to engage myself for that somewhere, well, because I am for the abolition of the privileges of marriage.³⁶

Her support for same-sex marriage is limited to saying that it is "not fundamentally bad" for other gays and lesbians to be able to marry. In these very limited terms, she is still on balance supportive of the existence of same-sex marriage (unlike Owen or Gemma, see table above). But Simone stresses the fact that she would not want to engage politically into supporting such a claim ("to fight for it").

Marriage is seen as bringing a lot of ideological baggage with it which for many stands for bigotry, inequality, double lives, economic advantage and sexism.³⁷ It can also be associated with cultural commercialization, as in Julie Bindel's feminist critique on gay marriage:

³⁴ Original: "Also, grundsätzlich denke ich, wenn - lesbische oder schwule Partner heiraten wollen, ähm, sollten sie das schon tun können, ganz grundsätzlich bin ich aber gegen ne Bevorzugung der Ehe gegenüber irgendwelchen andern Partnerschaften."

³⁵ The gay and lesbian "anti-gay marriage" movement, out of the four countries, has been most accentuated in Germany, see for example: Ilona Buneck, ed. (2000), *Unser Stück vom Kuchen?*. Also: Claudia Card (1997), "Against Marriage." The following quote parallels some of the discourses from the interviews (such as Gemma's), p. 8: "To now demand marriage, being a "disciplining system of force" - which, in my view, is outdated - for homosexuals as well is anything but an emancipating policy." (Original: "Die Ehe als "disziplinierendes Zwangssystem" - meiner Ansicht nach überholt - nun auch für Homos einzufordern ist alles andere als eine emanzipatorische Politik.") See also interview with Gloria, chapter 2, who identifies as a (queer) anti-gay marriage activist.

³⁶ Original: "[Ich] finde ich es grundsätzlich nicht schlecht, wenn sie heiraten können, - - sehe aber keinen, also für mich keinen besondern Grund, jetzt dafür zu kämpfen oder mich da irgendwo für einzusetzen. So. - Also. - Weil ich also eher für ne Abschaffung der Privilegien der Ehe bin."

³⁷ For the Marxist tradition in the critique of marriage, see Friedrich Engels "From the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" [1884] in Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (eds.). *Feminist Theory*. (New York: Mc Grawhill, 2005, 2nd edition: 100-102), e.g. "The man took command in the home also; the

When I was a young feminist in the early 1980s it was accepted that marriage was bad for women. [...] The whole gay wedding *debacle* has become hideously commercialised, just as it has for heterosexuals. [...] Yes, there are practical advantages – really important ones such as the right to be named as each others next of kin – but registering as civil partners means nipping into the local town hall in your jeans and signing a bit of paper [...] . Having equal rights to heterosexuals, such as those around inheritance tax and property ownership, is one thing, but being equally naff in proclaiming our love is another. Weddings should make anyone with good taste cringe. Aunt Mary having too much sweet sherry and talking about her operation, the odd fight between guests. [...] Have we really come this far to end up aspiring to being breeders?³⁸

What we can see in Bindel's critique of gay marriage is a distinction between the wedding ceremony, which carries all negative connotations, and the rights that are granted, which are described as "practical advantages" and "really important". Similarly, in the elements of anti-marriage discourses throughout the material, negative connotations are mostly associated with values that are seen as being attached to marriage, while the precise legal consequences of marriage laws are not the focus of such criticism. Only rarely does a claim to abolishing specific legal aspects of (heterosexual) marriage arise (such as in Simone's or Owen' discourse). Mostly, as in Bindel's argument as well, "equal rights" are the most common feature of the discourses throughout the field and dominate the normative positions even where marriage is seen as deeply flawed as an institution.

4.2. Influence on society and social change

In the discourse on social change, there is a similar overarching discourse that appears as dominant in the field. As regards the opinions on marriage and civil partnership, a positive judgement and an approval of equal rights were present almost throughout. On social change, a discourse of progress is the main common thread. Things have become easier, society more open, and homosexuality more accepted. However, beyond this common observation, discourses vary as to the specifics of how the changes come about, how far reaching they are, and the extent to which homosexuality remains a difficulty in different social spheres. The table below shows the dominant typology as being that of describing a big change towards a more accepting society with regards to homosexuality, while a smaller number of respondents limit this observation and very few point to counter-trends (see below). The structure of the section, yet again, will not follow the typologies, but instead start with the question of how, by many, social change is linked to the legal developments regarding same-sex couples.

woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children." (p. 102)

First, in discussing the positive opinions on partnership recognition, many respondents give the argument that it has a positive influence on society's acceptance of homosexuality. In this sense, rather than just benefiting those who register their partnerships, many see an advantage in changing the status of homosexuality in society. In discussing the discourses on social change, we shall therefore first turn to the question of the impact of the legal changes on social acceptance. Thereafter, we shall address the general idea of social progress, as independent of social change, where media representations or a general trend to more liberal attitudes are referred to. Finally, counter-elements to the general view of progress will be considered. Here, limits of progress and rejections of the progress discourse will be analyzed.

³⁸ Julie Bindel. "Marriage? No thanks, we're gay." (*The Independent*, 28/11/2005: 31)

Social Change?

	Big change	Clear change but still difficult	Yes but not so clear /much	No or close to no change	Some negative trends
B	Nadine Jenny Daniel Katharina Monika Sven	Petra	Hans Thorsten	Andreas	Simone
L	Mark Owen Harriet Jason Miguel Gemma Julia Kevin Matthew		Lasse Gareth		Anne
R	Gabriella Raffaele Angelo Mario Claudia Michele Bianca	Marianna Carlo Dario Elena	Antonella Luisa	Patti	
P	Fabienne Antoine Olivier Jacques Dorothée Christophe	Léa	Julien	Nicole	Jérémy

4.2.1. *The impact of legal changes of social acceptance*

A common view is that the acceptance of partnership institutions has and will have a positive effect throughout the different social spheres. The idea of progress is often represented as coming from the political level from which slowly, and in the long run, it trickles down to every corner of society.

Katharina (Berlin, 22)

K: For me it's not that much the question of marriage that is important, but rather [its] consequences in the social environment. And I think that it is simply a fact that contributes to recognition in general.

FJ: To what extent?

K: Let's say that in large parts of society, it is still not seen as normal if two women or two men are together. And I think that if on that political level it is possible to marry, or to register as a couple, in a way it contributes to its acceptance, even if it's something that has to be deepened. Of course, it will need quite some time until it filters through to all social layers.³⁹

In Katharina's description, the legitimacy that the law introduces is regarded as having something similar to an educational effect on society at large. In her case, this effect is even what she finds most appealing in the law as a whole. Her support for the recognition of same-sex partnership is thus motivated mainly by a political stance that increases acceptance.

Even those who, like Jason in the following example, see the possibility to use a civil partnership as very important for them personally, the question of how this law impacts on "people's attitudes" is equally important:

Jason (London, 47)

FJ: Do you think that things change with such a, such a reform such as the civil partnership ...

J: I, yeah, definitely. And I think people's attitudes change as well.

FJ: In what sense do attitudes change, - in what sense do they change?

J: Ehm, - I think the fact that there is some kind of - legal recognition, of relationships between same-sex couples, in, well, it clearly gives them legitimacy and therefore makes them more acceptable - instead of somehow being out there on the fringe.

The question was mostly directly asked, but in a more general wording ("Do you think that things change?") that could leave space for interpreting change for personal perspectives, societal changes or even the absence of changes. Jason here argues that "people's attitudes

³⁹ Original: "K: Das geht mir weniger darum, dass, also um die Heirat selber oder überhaupt, sondern eher was das sozusagen im sozialen Umfeld, nach sich zieht für Konsequenzen. Und ich denke, das ist einfach ne Tatsache, die zur allgemeinen Anerkennung beiträgt. - FJ: Inwiefern? - K: Nun also, das ist ja in weiten Teilen der Gesellschaft immer noch nicht als normal angesehen, wenn zwei Frauen oder zwei Männer miteinander zusammen sind. Und ich denke, wenn das auf dieser politischen Ebene eben möglich ist zu heiraten oder eine, ja, eheähnliche Lebensgemeinschaft eintragen zu lassen, dann trägt das schon irgendwie zur Akzeptanz mit bei, auch wenn das noch sozusagen etwas ist, was sich weiterhin vertiefen muss. Und so weiter. Also das wird noch, klar, ne ganze Weile dauern, bis das wirklich so in alle Gesellschaftsschichten durchgesickert ist."

change", where "people" implicitly refers to a heterosexual majority in society. A general perception of the legal recognition makes "them" "more acceptable", where "them" seems to refer to same-sex couples, but potentially also to homosexuality more generally. Without this, instead, they were "out there on the fringe", according to Jason. The move from marginality to legitimacy is a symbolic one rather than a change in specific rights and benefits. And the discourse concerning such an effect does not differ much whether such a legal reform has already taken place or not, as for instance in the Roman case, where Marianna and Claudia hypothesize about such an impact:

Marianna (Rome, 27) and Claudia (Rome, 33)

M: If there were recognition on the legal level, perhaps it would enter into the general mentality that it is something possible, that it is a decent thing. Perhaps with time. [...]

C: I think that too. Even if, as a country, I repeat, we are very much behind on that.⁴⁰

For many, like Jason, Katharina, Marianna and Claudia, as we have seen, it is hence the law itself that serves this function of progress. Yet quite often, this role is however played by the debates themselves and by the media coverage that has accompanied the legal changes. When asked about the consequences of legal recognition, Nadine for instance immediately points to the public debate, the fact that people have talked about it:

Nadine (Berlin, 41)

FJ: Has something changed? Do you think that through the legal recognition of lesbian and gay couples something has changed in society?

N: I do think so. Through this debate. [...] I think through the debate, the public debate, acceptance does continue [or grow], I think so, I do think so. And even if people are against it, that gays and lesbians can now marry, a debate always has some effect. Maybe not now right away, but the day after tomorrow, I am convinced of that. Yes, I do think so. [...] Because now they talk, well, in the [gay] scene it's a topic of conversation, but it is also [a topic] for Otto and Helga or so [for the average straight person], you know. And I believe that in the medium term it leads to, maybe not right away, but still -. And that it will really -. It was a small sensation after all, I would say, when, that, I don't know, twenty gay and lesbian couples went to the town hall and got married. That was quite an excitement. And I think that showing this, that showing oneself publicly, that leads to it being accepted, [doesn't it]? - Well, yes, yes yes, I think, not only tolerance but also a kind of acceptance is taking place. I think [laughs] that it is not like this anymore, [or] the other way around, that it is not such a topic of conversation at the coffee table, someone then just is gay, then you are lesbian, and that's it, you know. [...] That [people] no longer get so upset about it.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Original: "M: Se ci fosse un riconoscimento no, al livello legale, forse entrerebbe nella mentalità commune che è una cosa possibile, che è una cosa lecita. [...] Magari col tempo. [...] - C: Anchio penso questo. Anche se come paese, io ripeto, siamo molto, arretrati per questo."

⁴¹ Original: "FJ: Hat sich etwas geändert? Denkst du, es hat sich durch die rechtliche Anerkennung lesbischer und schwuler Paare etwas verändert? In der Gesellschaft? - N: Ich glaube schon. Durch diese Auseinandersetzung. [...] Ich denke, durch die Auseinandersetzung, durch die öffentliche Auseinandersetzung, dass sich da die Akzeptanz durchaus fortsetzt, ich glaube schon, ich glaube schon. Und selbst wenn Leute dagegen sind, dass jetzt Schwule und Lesben heiraten, ne Auseinandersetzung bewirkt immer was. Jetzt vielleicht nicht gleich aktuell, aber übermorgen, da bin ich überzeugt- davon. Ja, ich glaube schon. [...] Weil, es reden ja jetzt, gut, zwischen, in der Szene ist es Thema, aber es ist jetzt auch Thema bei - Otto und Helga, oder so, ne. - Und ich glaube, dass das schon dazu führt, mittelfristig, vielleicht nicht gleich aber, doch schon. Und, dass, dass wirklich, --- es war ja

In this passage, the focus on the public debate places legal recognition rather as a political event that makes "people talk" about homosexuality, and "make it a topic for Otto and Helga", as Nadine says. And such a debate is seen as having an effect on acceptance, "in the medium term", or "the day after tomorrow" – that people would "no longer be so upset about it". Along these lines, increased information and more widespread knowledge on homosexuality and gay life styles is what many see as a key aspect of the legal changes to partnership laws. Following this line of thought, one could presume that the political elite would figure as the trail blazing social actor pushing things forward. But in a slightly contradictory way, this is only rarely what the discourses here encountered imply, as the previous passages of countries being "behind" illustrated: very few describe political elites as particularly courageous or quick in their push for same-sex recognition.

In her study of same-sex couples in the US, Kathleen Hull⁴² points to an instrumental endorsement of marriage in a perspective that has not been as explicitly present in the interviews conducted here, i.e. to marry for that purpose. A majority of the respondents here view the legal change as something that could change society, like Katharina above, but would not consider registering their partnership with the same political intention. The different observations are probably linked to the fact that her sample is that of committed long-term partnerships. For many of her respondents, she says that beyond the expectation of practical benefits for their couple, it is the idea of society's changing view of homosexuality that matters:

But these practical benefits are not the only reason same-sex couples desire legal recognition. Many people in committed same-sex relationships also yearn for the symbolic benefits that legal marriage confers. At a minimum, these symbolic benefits consist of a grudging recognition from straight society that committed same-sex relationships exist.⁴³

Or even more so:

These individuals look to the law to perform an essentially cultural task, communicating to the broader society that gay and lesbian couples are "normal", "the

auch, ne kleine Sensation, ich sag ma, wenn da, dass dann, weiß nicht, zwanzig schwule und Lesben Paare zum Rathaus gegangen sind und, sich vermählt haben. Das war ja schon ne Aufregung. Und ich glaube das Zeigen, das macht dann, das Zeigen in der Öffentlichkeit, das führt schon denk ich dazu, dass es - akzeptierten wird? – Naja, ja, doch, doch, ich denke, nicht nur toleriert, sondern auch ne Akzeptanz stattfindet. Glaub ich. [lacht] dass es nicht mehr so, --- andersrum, da nicht mehr so im Kaffeetisch dann so n so n Thema ist, dann is man halt schwul, dann ist man halt lesbisch, und fertig, ne. [...] Dass man sich nicht mehr so drüber aufregt, ne."

⁴² Kathleen Hull. "The Cultural Power of Law and the Cultural Enactment of Legality: The Case of Same-Sex Marriage." (*Law and Social Inquiry*, 2003: 629-657)

⁴³ Ibid: 656

same", "just like you", deserving of recognition and respect for the commitment they have made.⁴⁴

Mostly, in the discourses here, the registration of partnerships for political reasons does not appear to be a main consideration, even though, as we have seen in Nadine's discourse, the visibility of married same-sex couples can be seen as contributing to a debate and thus to greater acceptance. Either the cost of such an act appears to be too high for themselves personally, or, rather than the actual number of registrations, it is the existence of the law in itself that is seen as changing society through the legitimacy that the availability of such a legal option represents.

In this line of thought it is rather from the legitimacy in symbolic, abstract terms that partnership recognition is associated with a greater degree of acceptance. But not all subscribe to this logic, and some explicitly reject it. Simone, for example, in the following passage, says that she does "not [have] the feeling that anybody is saying, just because lesbians and gays can marry now, I recognize them." The crucial discussions and debates, in quite some contrast to Nadine's discourse above, are here seen as unrelated to the question of partnership recognition:

Simone (Berlin, 43)

FJ: Do you think something has changed? Do you think that through the legal recognition of lesbian and gay couples something has changed in society?

S: No. – I do believe that all in all something has changed a little bit. But I don't think that it has happened through this, eh, civil partnership [Lebenspartnerschaft], but rather for example through the outing of well known public figures, [and through] overall apparent liberalization, and by people who, lets say, are somewhat marginal or whatever in this society. But through individual fights that have been led for the recognition of gay and lesbian ways of life, or in general this idea, or this life plan. Well there I think there have been campaigns [...] the gay pride [Christopher Street Day] twenty years ago also used to be much more political than it is today. The AIDS discussion anyway. So all these things I think have brought about change. But I don't have the feeling that anybody, just because gays and lesbians can marry, has that, I recognize them because of that. – Well, not at all actually. – I would say. Even if, ok, I mean, of course I have, let's say my social environment is situated in a gay and lesbian community, so I'm not that much in touch with anyone else. But if I discuss it with my mother, or then occasionally with aunt, uncle or whoever, then I don't have the feeling that that has been the decisive factor. So, no.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid: 656

⁴⁵ Original: "FJ: Denkst du es hat sich etwas geändert? Denkst du, dass sich durch die rechtliche Anerkennung lesbischer und schwuler Paare in der Gesellschaft was verändert hat? - S: Nö. – Ich glaube zwar, dass sich insgesamt n bisschen was verändert hat. Aber ich glaube nicht, dass das durch diese, ähm, Lebenspartnerschaft passiert ist, sondern also eher durch zum Beispiel Outings von, äh, - ja, bekannteren Persönlichkeiten, von na, insgesamt, scheinbaren Liberalisierungs- und, - - von Leuten, die sagen wir mal eben etwas am Rande oder wo auch immer stehen in dieser Gesellschaft. Aber, äh, und durch einzelne Kämpfe, die geführt worden sind für ne Anerkennung schwul, schwul-lesbischer Lebensweisen oder überhaupt dieser, dieser Einstellung oder, oder, - des Lebensentwurfes. Also da denk ich sind schon, äh, - Kampagnen gelaufen, da ist in meiner [ich meine?], - der CSD vor zwanzig Jahren war auch mal weitaus politischer als er heute ist. Und, äh. Die AIDS Diskussion ganz sicherlich. Äh, also diese ganzen Sachen denke ich, haben etwas verändert. Aber ich hab nicht das Gefühl, dass jetzt irgendwer, nur weil Schwul-Lesben hei, Lesben heiraten können jemand sagt, ich erkenn die deshalb an. -

Simone sees a small-scale societal change as the result of individual political actions, "Outings", "Campaigns", gay prides in the past that were "much more political", or the discussions about AIDS.⁴⁶ In contrast to Hull's analysis, and in some contradiction with her previous discourse, Simone here gives a very "political" discourse with references to political actors and events, but completely rejects any symbolism of gaining legitimacy through marriage.

For others, the impact of legal change is limited because it will not be able to change negative attitudes towards homosexuality. When his friend Angelo says that legal recognition can overcome social exclusion, Carlo contradicts his view:

Angelo (Rome, 29) and Carlo (Rome, 34)

A: Instead, probably, formal recognition would be an opening up to the world. So it would give us the chance to be more recognized together, calmer, more at ease.

C: No, I don't think that's it's quite like that. I mean, in my opinion it remains only and exclusively related to a bureaucratic fact. Because then, in fact, according to me, you always stay the homosexual couple that will anyway be singled out by someone. Perhaps, as things stand now, perhaps less, by less people compared to before. But anyway, there will always be this percentage [of people] that will point at you and that will judge you.⁴⁷

The impact of the institutional changes on the social changes is interpreted differently in balancing trends and events, popular culture and politics, national events and global trends such as through US film or TV productions, international music culture and so on. Most often, the discourses on where change comes from are intertwined, where the law for civil partnership is seen within a social development that links media representation, generational change, politics and a general trend towards liberalization. Sven for example describes how he observed the older generation discussing homosexuality because of its media-presence:

Sven (Berlin, 39)

I do think that the law itself, or to make it the law, has simply revived the political debate, and thereby also the societal debate. It was, it's now been half a year or three quarters, since I was

Also eigentlich gar nicht. - Würd ich sagen. - Wobei, also gut, ich meine, - ich hab natürlich, also sagen wir mal so, mein, - - Bewegungsumfeld befindet sich auch mehr in der schwul-lesbischen Gemeinschaft, von daher hab ich jetzt auch nicht so viel mit anderen zu tun. Aber jetzt wenn ich mit meiner Mutter diskutiere, oder eben vielleicht dann doch mal Tante Onkel oder was auch immer dann, ähm, - hab ich nicht das Gefühl dass das der ausschlaggebende Punkt war. Also, nicht."

⁴⁶ E.g. Bersani (1995), *Homos*

⁴⁷ Original: "A: Invece, probabilmente, un, un riconoscimento formale, sarebbe anche un'apertura al mondo. Quindi ci consentirebbe di essere più riconosciuti, in insieme, più calmi, - più tranquilli ...

C: No, non, non credo che sia proprio così. Cioè per, il mio, la mio opinione, rimane solo ed esclusivamente legato a un fatto poi burocratico. Perché poi di fatto, secondo me, resterei sempre la coppia omosessuale che verrei comunque sempre additato da qualcuno. Forse, adesso come adesso, forse da meno, da, da poche persone rispetto a prima. Però comunque sia, rimarrà, rimarrà sempre quel un per cento che ti additerà e che ti giudicherà."

sitting in a completely normal gastro-pub, and was eating something, and at the neighbouring table there was a bowling [Kegel, ninepins] club or what do I know, from Swabia [South-West Germany], and there were two who told each other about a TV series, a TV show, a news show, where amongst other things they talked about Wowereit as gay mayor [of Berlin], and there I noticed how somehow, yes, it was just unbelievable for the ladies that something like that is possible. And those were, I'd put it that way, those could have been our aunts or mothers.⁴⁸

In Sven's description, a generational difference is underlined by pointing to the people he observed as potentially being "our aunts or mothers". They are portrayed as rather conservative, and it remains unclear whether their discussion on homosexuality was a wholly depreciative one. His discourse moves from the law to everyday talk he happened to listen to in a restaurant. To that extent, it parallels the idea of a "trickle down" effect, from the political and legal down to common people. But similar to Carlo, he points at resistance in un-accepting circles. And he also underlines the role of the media image to feed into the image "our aunts and mothers" have of homosexuality, which is a commonly described element of social progress. In this kind of discourse, then, the law sometimes becomes an accessory among various forms of media events. *Civil Partnership*, *Pacs* or gay marriage are often competing with TV shows, soap operas, the coming out of a well-known politician, an artist, or the Gay Pride. We had already seen such a media focused analysis in chapter 1, in Léa's perspective:

Léa (Paris, 30)

They talk a lot about it on TV. [...] You watch all the soap operas they are showing at the moment, there's always a gay guy in the series. In movies it's the same. So, it's really about being more present in the media. So, obviously, it gets more into people's mentalities. But I think it's not accepted yet as it should be.⁴⁹

Most subscribe to the idea that there has been a fundamental change in attitudes towards homosexuality, and that, in one way or another, it has become easier to be lesbian or gay. While the question in the interviews was left open, most respondents pointed to the past five, ten, fifteen or twenty years as those in which things have become easier.

⁴⁸ Original: "Ich denke schon, dass dieses Gesetz an sich, oder das zum Gesetz zu machen, äh, die politische Debatte, und damit aber auch die, gesellschaftliche Debatte einfach noch mal wieder entfacht hat. Es war, es ist jetzt glaub ich n halbes oder drei viertel Jahr her, da hab ich in 'ner ganz normalen Gaststätte gegessen, und was gegessen, und am Nachbartisch war glaub ich n Kegelklub oder ich weiß nicht was, aus m Schwabenland, - und, da berichteten zwei sich gegenseitig über, äh, ne Fernsehserie, ne Fernsehsendung, ne Informationssendung, wo unter anderem auch hier Wowereit eben als schwuler Bürgermeister, äh, gekennzeichnet wurde, und da merkte noch so, irgendwie, ja also an sich unverständlich war das den Damen, dass so was, dass es so was geht. Und das waren im Grunde, sag ich mal, ja aus der schwäbischen Provinz, aber Menschen wie du und ich, in Anführungsstrichen, also die unsere Tanten oder Mütter hätten sein können."

⁴⁹ Original: "On en parle beaucoup à la télé. [...] Tu regardes toutes les séries qui passent en ce moment, il y a un homo dans la série. Dans les films c'est pareil. Donc c'est vraiment que c'est beaucoup plus médiatisé. Donc forcément ça rentre plus dans la mentalité des gens. Mais je pense que ce n'est pas encore accepté comme ça devrait l'être."

4.2.2. A general social change

While nearly all respondents somehow see legal recognition as a "good thing overall", it is often seen as a mere expression of broader social progress. An inner logic to social progress seems to be the driving force, a broad necessity to create a more liberal society.

A more open society, an easier gay or lesbian life, or even a trendy fashion which is admired by others – things have changed. Society has moved towards a greater acceptance according to the opinions encountered. Most often, the media is cited as a clear factor in precipitating broad change throughout the past years. Through greater media presence, homosexuality has been more present in the social sphere and acceptance has increased. Jérôme links greater acceptance to such a view, saying it has become more "exposed" and therefore, "necessarily more and more accepted":

Olivier (Paris, 39)

More generally, yes, I think it has evolved. It has [evolved] a little bit through the fact that, precisely, how it gets more and more filtered through the media and so on, it's more and more exposed, [so] it inevitably is more accepted.⁵⁰

The media, television shows, politicians and other public personalities are regularly cited as having changed the image of homosexuality, with a much wider presence in the public sphere. The comparison between the past is sometimes based on a personal account, sometimes on an abstract imagined past. Often, discourses about the past reflect both changes in the respondents' personal lives and observed changes more generally on the social level. While the former, especially in the case of older respondents, can be linked to a biographical account of "liberation" in which society has turned out to be more accepting after a "coming out process",⁵¹ for many younger respondents, the past is constructed as an image of darkness in a discourse of societal progress.⁵² In both respects, the narratives are not considered here to be adequate representations of events, but a discursive construction of perceived societal progress.

Jenny for example, a young woman living in Berlin, outlines a trend towards greater acceptance of homosexuality in more sweeping and quite general, but forceful terms. She says

⁵⁰ Original: "D'une façon générale, oui, je pense que ça a évolué. Ça a un petit peu – de par le fait que ça a – justement comme ça filtre dans les medias et cetera de plus en plus, que c'est de plus en plus exposé, c'est forcément de plus en plus accepté."

⁵¹ See, again, Ken Plummer. "Coming out, breaking the silence and recovering: Introducing some modernist tales" in Plummer (1995). *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, change and social worlds*: 50-61.

she is lucky to live today rather than in the past in which being gay or lesbian was far more difficult. Using the metaphor of the stake, she implies that up to the 1990s, being homosexual meant being publicly persecuted:

Jenny (Berlin, 20)

The young ones, they find it absolutely cool to be gay or lesbian. And then they also want to be it themselves. [...] Well, because today, it's simply more in the spotlight, it's more present in the public debate, in the media. The mayor [of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit] as well for example. These are all things that fifteen years ago, nobody would have imagined. They would all be burnt at the stake those who were gay. Plenty of things have changed, for sure. I would not have wanted to be public or to be outed ten or fifteen years ago. I'm glad it's now and not ten years ago. I think that would have been much more difficult for me.⁵³

The contrast between past and present, in Jenny's account, is one between a medieval setup on the one hand, and a very open society today, in which homosexuality is "in the spotlight" on the other. In the metaphorical description of all gays being "burnt at the stake" fifteen years ago, and the observation that "the young ones [...] find it absolutely cool", we see that for her, there are worlds between the period before the 1990s and today. Jenny, who was born in East Germany, implicitly refers to the GDR, which here belongs to some dark ages.⁵⁴ In the last sentence, the view that it "would have been much more difficult for me" underlines this image of the past, but also links her general interpretation of society to her own imagined life at the time.

⁵² I have looked at the construction of a "dark past" in Frédéric Jörgens. "East" Berlin: Lesbian and Gay Narratives on Everyday Life, Social Acceptance, and Past and Present." Roman Kuhar and Judit Takacs (eds.). *Everyday life of GLBT in Eastern and Central Europe*. (Ljubljana: Peace Institute Editions, 2006)

⁵³ Original: "Die Jugendlichen, die finden das jetzt irgendwie total trendy, schwul oder lesbisch zu sein, und dementsprechend wollen sie es dann auch sein. [...] Na weil, weil das heute einfach mehr im Vordergrund steht, mehr in der Öffentlichkeit. Zum Beispiel auch der Bürgermeister und keine Ahnung. Das ist alles, sind alles so ne Sachen, vor zehn fünfzehn Jahren hätte sich das keiner gedacht. Da war das Scheiterhaufen hier, alle Leute die das sind, ne. Es hat sich vieles geändert, doch, Also ich möchte vor zehn oder fünfzehn Jahren mich, also mich nicht outen, geoutet haben wollen. Also, ich bin froh, dass das jetzt ist und nicht vor zehn Jahren. Da hätte ich's glaub ich schwieriger gehabt."

⁵⁴ East and West Germany had parallel developments in matters of homosexuality that cannot easily be read as black and white. In the legal context, during the post-war period, the GDR had nominally been more progressive in decriminalizing homosexuality: the discriminatory §175 and §175a on homosexual acts were abolished through consecutive reforms in 1950, 1957, 1968 and 1988. In West Germany, in contrast, the highly repressive form of the paragraph introduced in the period of National Socialism had been left untouched until as late as 1969. Thereafter, scrapping the remaining weaker form of §175, which stipulated an older age of consent for homosexual acts than for heterosexual ones, constituted a continuous aim of gay and lesbian movements and was achieved only after reunification, in 1994. (See Hans-Georg Stümke. *Homosexuelle in Deutschland: Eine politische Geschichte*. (München: Beck, 1989). Also: www.juraforum.de/jura/specials/special/id/15965/. Culturally, however, the lesbian and gay scene of East Germany mostly appeared less vibrant, to say the least. There was nothing there comparable to the bars and discotheques that became fundamental experiences in lesbian and gay lives in Hamburg, Cologne or West Berlin. According to commentators, the absence of a commercial homosexual subculture is what characterized its main difference from the West. See: Michael Holy. "Ungelebte Ost/West Beziehungen" Günther Grau (ed.). *Schwulsein 2000, Perspektiven im vereinigten Deutschland*. (Hamburg: Männerschwarmskript 2001: 52-70), pp. 58f.

Despite recurring generational variations, the trend towards greater acceptance is nevertheless quasi-universally observed in all four cities. Indeed, the younger generation is often described as an indicator for continuing progress in that sense.

Gabriella (Rome, 39)

FJ: Do you think that in the last years the way in which society views homosexuality has changed? To you think that in Italy today it is more accepted? Is it [...] different to be gay or lesbian compared to before?

G: Without any doubt! Without any doubt. Well, one needs to consider compared to when. Compared to thirty years ago yes. No doubt there has been a great step forward, also in Italy. Even if, as a matter of fact, the laws don't help us. But there is still a way of, I mean my mother for example, who was born at a time, my mother was born in 1939, she will not be able to be, even if she tries, how to say, be modern. She will never be able to accept the idea of homosexuality, well yes. And neither of the daughter that means. Because these people have lived in a period in which it was taboo, I mean it was forbidden during fascism, let's say it was extremely risky. So it is difficult for them, also for my father, it's difficult that they could really-. But now, what for them had been a fault, now, with time, has become something that is still, not dirty but still something that isn't good. But they have also changed a bit. So that means that society is slowly, slowly changing. Here as well. So. Thirty years ago being homosexual meant shame, a big stigma. Now instead, it's not like that any more, I mean, it's different. Without any doubt. - But it could [still] be better. I am very optimistic though. Because I see the young Italians, they are changing, they have another view of homosexuality. I mean, some don't think about it at all, in the sense that [for them] it's a natural thing. Others still make little jokes, kids, but in fact, they are the first who are not as our parents were. They don't discriminate.⁵⁵

For Gabriella, there has "without any doubt" been a social change concerning attitudes towards homosexuality. She explicitly refers to the legal situation, which is not supportive of such acceptance; change has occurred "despite the laws that don't support us." Her description of the social change is nuanced in different ways: She describes "a big step" ("un grande passo"), but immediately points to "these people" ("questa gente"), her mother's generation,

⁵⁵ Original: "FJ: Credi che negli ultimi anni, il modo di come la società vede l'omosessualità è cambiata? Credi che è più accettata adesso in Italia? - E divertente, eh, non divertente [rido], differente essere gay o lesbica in confronto a prima?

G: Indubbiamente. - Indubbiamente. - Allora, bisogna vedere rispetto a quando. Rispetto a trent'anni fa, sì. - Eh, indubbiamente c'è stato un grande passo avanti, anche in Italia. Nonostante appunto le leggi non ci supportino. Però, esiste ancora - un modo di, cioè, per esempio, - mia mamma, - essendo nata in una epoca, e del trentanove mia madre, non potrà, nonostante lei cerchi di, - come dire, essere moderna, non potrà mai accettare, - eh, l'idea dell'omosessualità, insomma. Ma nemmeno della figlia, cioè. Perché questa gente ha vissuta in un periodo in cui era, era tabù, cioè, era vietato, durante il fascismo diciamo, - si rischiava grosso, - quindi è difficile per loro, anche a mio padre, è difficile che loro possano poi veramente, - . Però, adesso, ciò che per loro era un, una colpa, adesso, con, eh, col tempo, è diventata, sì, una cosa sempre, non sporca, però una cosa un po' che non, che non va bene. Però, anche loro sono leggermente cambiati. Quindi questo significa che la società piano piano sta cambiando. Anche da noi. E quindi. Trent'anni fa, essere omosessuale significava un'onta, cioè, una macchia grossa. Adesso invece, non c'è più, cioè, è diversa. Indubbiamente. - Però potrebbe essere meglio. Io sono molto ottimista però. Perché vedo che i giovani, - Italiani, - mmm, stanno cambiando, hanno una idea diversa dell'omosessualità. Cioè, alcuni proprio non la consideranno, nel senso che è una cosa che c'è, una cosa naturale. Altri ancora fanno battutine, ragazzi, però, di fatto poi, sono i primi a essere, non essere, come erano i nostri genitori. A non discriminare."

who would "never be able to accept the idea of homosexuality".⁵⁶ However, she concludes that "they have also changed slightly", thereby contradicting the previous view of the intransigent older generation. And she sees this as an indication of a slow but steady change ("piano piano"), somewhat more moderate than the description of "a big step" in the same passage. It seems that thinking of social acceptance in society is always dependent on the specific social context that is thought of, and, as in Gabriella's case here, the way that progress is viewed will shift according to the context that is being referred to. For her, at the end of the passage, she says she is "optimistic" when she thinks of the younger generation, "young Italians [...] are changing". As we see, critical nuances are contrasted by her repeated "indubbiamente" ("no doubt about that"): as for most respondents, there is "no doubt" that things have become better.

In various cases, the element of change observed through generational difference is also expressed from the point of view of different attitudes of younger gays and lesbians themselves: the younger ones more easily accept themselves as being homosexual, and experience it with less of a personal conflict than previous generations. They are also often said to live their gay and lesbian lives at an earlier stage. This phenomenon can be hinted at through the generational differences within the sample itself. But very frequently, and more explicitly, it appears in the discourses of what the respondents observe around them, such as in the following:

Julia (London, 36)

I think it's changed a lot since I came out, [in] 1987. [...] You can see there's more confidence in very young gay people. You know I can see it now in this place [London] I was sitting in a bar here and I see girls coming in here, they are teenagers. You know, they are happy with their sexuality. When I was a teenager I was frightened to death, in case I got, you know, beaten up, or rejected by my family or things like that. But it's very, very different now.

Julia compares the moment when she herself "came out" with her observations concerning younger lesbians – less than one generation after her. Her interpretation of change is drawn on what she sees in the lesbian bar scene itself. In her description, fear has quite radically transformed into happiness. While narratives of this kind are very common in the sample, and in all four cities, yet again, the biographical element needs to be taken into account: Julia's own transformation into feeling "happier" about her sexuality is not without influence on her judgment about the possibilities of happiness which an affirmed lesbian identity can give her –

⁵⁶ The fascist period stands out as framing her parents' generation. It should be added that she is originally from a town that was a particular stronghold both for Mussolini and has continued to be for the post-war fascist and "post-fascist" parties, Latina (Lazio).

compared to a past in which she was herself "frightened to death". However, on the level of discourses, her description of the younger generation as being freer and happier with regards to their own homosexuality cannot be overlooked. We will examine the question of generational change further in chapter 6.

So far, we have seen a range of differently nuanced progress discourses concerning the acceptance and affirmation of homosexuality. But by a certain number of respondents, the view of a greater opening of society towards homosexuality is also often seen as hitting a certain limit, where the progress story will not overcome a stigma which some attach to it. The idea of singling out gays for their homosexuality means that the stigma as the defining feature of homosexuality remains present, and, as in this case, is somewhat maintained despite simultaneously embracing a progress discourse.

4.2.3. Things are getting better, but still ...

The above table indicates the largely coherent subscription of respondents in all four cities and across all categories to the idea of big social change. But there are two restrictions to this. First, most who subscribe to the idea of big social change differentiate between overall societal change and specific deficits in the acceptance of homosexuality. Secondly, some respondents do not subscribe to this idea, seeing the acceptance of gays and lesbians as rather constant, and others point to some negative trends or to the remaining difficulties that make the change a merely relative one. Let us consider the specific deficits first.

In reviewing the respondents' discourses on social change, a certain parallel arises concerning the dichotomy between the overall opinion and the personal use of partnership recognition. We find the abstract discourse on society at large on the one hand, a progress discourse mostly shared by the respondents, and the discourses about the personal lives and concrete experiences of the interviewees, which give a picture of a variety of different realities on the other hand. These latter ones, as we saw at the beginning of the paper, provide an explanatory ground for the construction of gay and lesbian public identities: The potential use which can be made of partnership registration is part of a diversified identity management.

Luisa doubts the view that things have improved, saying that the stigma remains:

Luisa (Rome, 29)

FJ: Do you think that in the last years, the way in which society views homosexuality has changed?

L: Well I say [it's] still the same. They still call us poofs and lesbians and that's it. [laughs] It hasn't changed because in any case, people still look at you – with disgust lets say. I still feel that myself anyway.

FJ: Could you give me an example maybe? Or tell a story, I don't know, when you ...

L: No, well, when I was at school unfortunately what happened was that they all knew, the whole school, they were cracking jokes, saying "disgusting lesbian", hence the kind of jokes...

FJ: What, the kids at school then?

L: Not kids! I'm talking about [when] I was 18, 19. So, the last year at school. I don't know, maybe I was with a girl during the summer break, and to my partner they said: "So now you too are crossing to the other side?" So, I want to say, there were loads of jokes, yes.

FJ: Mm, and how did you react?

L: Well I was not feeling well at all. I was very very down. Then, once I was out of school, going to university, I met gay guys.

[...]

L: Well, compared to before, you talk of, well, lets say that people today, it would be ugly to say [that they got] used to it, but nevertheless, less, less nasty towards us lets say. But there are always people who, who lets say, they are, they comment, and still criticize. But maybe compared to some years ago [it's less]. I don't know.⁵⁷

Luisa's view on social change is sometimes contradictory. On the one hand, in an earlier passage, she argued that things were slowly improving. ("piccoli passi li stiamo facendo dai"). However, when asked directly about change, she says it's "still the same", and highly stigmatized. As we have said, such contradictions naturally occur in longer narratives on a complex question such as societal change – to which ambivalence and contradiction are mostly inherent. Here, she refers to school as the major experience of being stigmatized for being homosexual. Her story underlines the idea of an identity formation as a "coming out" process. She concedes that people have become "less mean".

It would be tempting to conclude, with regards to Luisa's assertion that nothing has changed, that Rome as one of the four cities analyzed here stands out for not following the same pattern as the other three. However, in the interview, conducted jointly with Marianna, Luisa and

⁵⁷ Original: "FJ: Credete che negli ultimi anni, il modo di come la società vede l'omosessualità è cambiata?

L: Ma io dico sempre uguale. Ci chiamano sempre frocci e lesbiche e basta. [ridiamo] Non è cambiato perché comunque la gente ti guarda sempre – schifata diciamo. La vivo sulla mia pelle comunque.

FJ: Potresti darmi un esempio forse? O raccontare una storia, non lo so quando ti, -

L: No, va be', quando a scuola mi è capitato purtroppo che la sapevano tutti, tutta la scuola, mi ha mica - facevano battute, facevano 'la lesbica schifosa', quindi, battute della, ...

FJ: Proprio i bambini a scuola quindi ...

L: No bambini! Dici, ti parlo – avevo diciotto diciannove anni. Quindi. L'ultimo anno di scuola – non so, magari stavo con – con una compagna [...] durante l'intervallo scolastico, e alla mia compagna, dicevano, adesso passi anche te all'altra sponda? Quindi, voglio dire, battute se ne facevano, questo.

FJ: Mm. – E tu come hai reagito?

L: Be', stavo molto male. Molto molto male. Poi una volta che sono uscita dalla scuola, frequentando l'università, ho conosciuto ragazzi gay. [...] Be', rispetto a prima, tu parli di, be', diciamo la gente adesso un po' si è – sarebbe brutto dire abituata, però comunque meno cattiva diciamo nei nostri confronti. Però ci sono sempre persone che sono, diciamo, che commentano, che comunque criticano. Però forse rispetto a qualche anno - non lo so."

Claudia, opinions were divided. And also, such contrasts between views concerning progress and remaining difficulties are not absent in the interviews elsewhere, such as in Harriet's case, who immediately refers to hate crimes and to gay teenagers' difficulties with their families:

Harriet (London, 35)

I see much more public affection. And much more gay characters on television. – And, – so I think, you know, the visibility is higher, and the tolerance is higher. But, you know, there was actually a gay man kicked to death about a month ago in London, – by a gang of teenagers. So, – there is still a long way to go. And then, err, – you do hear that, some teenagers, if they are quite troubled being gay and you know, they're being estranged from their families, so, – I, I would say it is easier to be gay now considering it used to be illegal. But I'm sure it is much easier now, and employers are much more open-minded than they used to be.

In Harriet's discourse, the progress discourse is thus linked to a discrimination discourse: whilst agreeing on things having become easier, according to her, discrimination, fears and hate crimes should not be forgotten.⁵⁸

In considering the above table, neither the age factor nor the city seem to play a clearly important role in evaluating social progress, despite the fact that in the biographical narratives, some respondents who are over 30 years old tell of having experienced homosexuality as a major stigma compared to the very young respondent.⁵⁹ But generally, despite the overall tendency to a view of social progress, limits of social acceptance are pointed out in a range of contexts.

4.2.4. Not everywhere, not everyone

While views that oppose the story of social progress are the exception in the discourses encountered throughout the fieldwork, and in all four cities, the stories of the respondents' own social environments significantly vary between individual respondents. In different contexts, the stigma attached to homosexuality, and the risk in specific settings or environments is addressed. This common trait, shared by most, stands in contrast to the dominant progress discourse. In other words, progress is relative. Some respondents find that

⁵⁸ On Harriet's reference see BBC, 16/10/2005, "Man murdered in homophobic attack", www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4346442.stm. In the fieldwork, one respondent, Gareth, refers in great length to his own experience of being assaulted in a "gay attack", as he says, in cruising grounds in East London, including having been stabbed in the legs. In France, since an alleged violent attack in 2004 which prompted President Chirac to support legislation against homophobic discrimination, such attacks have both been more under the media-spotlight and reportedly more numerous: 131 homophobic attacks were reported in 2005, see *Le Figaro* 27/09/2006.

⁵⁹ A majority of typologies is situated in the "big change" column for each of the four cities respectively (slightly larger majority in London, slightly smaller in Berlin), and younger and older respondents figure in each of the typologies.

there has not been much change in specific settings. Jérémy describes his everyday experiences in the Parisian suburb where he lives, where he sees the insult as a regular event that he thinks "has happened to every homosexual":

Jérémy (Paris, 30)

J: It has never gone very far. But, without happening every day, a homosexual gets regularly insulted in the suburbs - regularly. I think that it has happened to every homosexual. I don't think you will find a homosexual to whom it hasn't happened. You get regularly treated as a poof ["pédé"] or - . You get insulted, of course - even if it's in the tone of a mockery, [and even if] it does not get to being an aggression - of course, yes.

FJ: But concerning you, because you were in a couple, or because...

J: No, because I think - well, then of course, one has to distinguish [different] people. In the suburbs, they won't make a distinction between those they aggress: [they aggress] simply those who are different from them, who are not dressed in the same way. So pouf ["pédé"] is an insult a kind of known to simply stigmatise those who aren't like them. Perhaps when they say pouf ["pédé"] they will think specifically of a homosexual. [But], most of the time, it's not a homosexual. It's just that the dress code is not the same, and as soon as one isn't wearing jogging trousers, one isn't dressed, yeah, in the suburb fashion.⁶⁰

Jérémy's discourse portrays the homosexual as a target of mockery.⁶¹ In France, the "taboo of homosexuality in the estates ("cités)" is often described as relating to marginalized North-African cultural communities. Disparaged Parisian suburbs are described as an environment where insults, violence and abuse towards gays is the norm for those who don't manage to hide their homosexuality.⁶² One needs to be careful not to generalise - neither on cultural grounds, nor on geographical ones. What is interesting in Jérémy's discourse, in contrast to descriptions of homophobic attacks directed towards gays in particular, is that he describes "homosexuality" as a general attribute of mockery rather than homosexuals as the target of the insult. In other terms, preferably, a heterosexual will be mocked by calling him "pédé". While the use of "pédé" as an insult in France is not new, in Germany an increased use of the word "schwul" (gay) as a negative in youth culture can be observed, and in the UK, the term "gay"

⁶⁰ Original: "J : Ça n'a jamais été très loin, mais, sans que ça arrive tous les jours, mais régulièrement un homosexuel se fait insulter en Banlieue, régulièrement. Je crois que c'est arrivé à tout homosexuel. Je pense pas qu'on trouvera un homosexuel à qui ça n'est pas arrivé. Régulièrement on se fait traiter de pédé ou on se fait insulter, bien sûr. Même si c'est sur le ton de la moquerie ou ça ne va pas jusqu'à l'agression, évidemment oui.

FJ : Mais par rapport à toi, parce que tu étais en couple, ou parce que ...

J : Non, parce que, je pense que, - . Bon, alors, après, évidemment il faut faire la distinction entre les gens. Dans la Banlieue, il vont pas faire la distinction entre ceux qu'ils agressent: [Ils agressent] simplement ceux qui sont différents d'eux, qui ne sont pas habillés de la même façon. Alors pédé c'est une insulte un petit peu connu, mais, - tout simplement pour stigmatiser ce qui n'est pas comme eux. Euh, peut-être que, quand ils disent pédés ils penseront spécifiquement à un homosexuel. [Mais] la plupart du temps c'est pas un homosexuel. C'est simplement que le code vestimentaire n'est pas le même, et qu'à partir du moment où on n'est pas habillé en jogging, on est pas habillé, voilà, à la mode Banlieue."

⁶¹ On the "insult" see Didier Eribon. "Le choc de l'injure" his opening chapter Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*, pp. 29-32. This question will be looked at again in chapter 6. Jérémy, a literature PhD student, actually himself (critically) referred to this author at some stage in the interview.

⁶² Kessous, Mustapha. "Le tabou homo des cités." (*Le Monde*, 29/1/2006), online version.

has only recently come to be used as a negative, meaning "bad", "unpleasant", or "un-cool" – in both cases with a meaning that has become detached from homosexuality.⁶³

For many respondents, specific persons in their social environments, such as their parents, or more abstract groups of society are judged as being rather intolerant towards homosexuality. In the concrete social environment of the respondents, many are said to refuse to accept it. Hence, the observed general trend towards greater acceptance does not change the fact that for a number of respondents, difficulties remain in specific situations and setting. In many interviews, specific social settings such as the family, the workplace or specific cultural groups are singled out. Avoiding certain areas or certain groups of people is often a result of this. Abstract references to social groups can imply a careful approach to being *out* as much as personal experiences with specific persons. It would go too far to cover different contexts in which this occurs. The different settings that are spelled out and the consequences that experienced difficulties and imagined risks in specific environments have for public behaviour and identity construction will be analysed in chapter 5. At this stage, rather, we should simply point to the variety of forms of discrimination and non-acceptance that emerge from the interview material. While non-acceptance does not overall stand at the forefront of the interviews, it still imposes a restriction on the discourse of social progress that we have looked at above. For most lesbians and gays, caution and sometimes fear persist. The fact that people talk about it more equally increases the attention drawn to homophobic violence and discrimination that has not ceased to exist. In certain areas, affection to a girl- or boyfriend would never be shown publicly in order to avoid problems or the risk of aggression. Some refer to gay areas such as *Soho* in London or the *Marais* in Paris as "safe havens". As Julien (Paris, 29) points out that maybe after all not much has changed in people's attitudes towards homosexuality: "People don't change their opinions. If they have, it's because before they had no opinion at all."⁶⁴

What has changed is often situated on a symbolic level. It seems that today, it is no longer society at large that excludes gays and lesbians and discriminates against them, but concrete persons: "my parents", "colleagues", "my daughter's friends' parents", "the people in my

⁶³ See for example Kevin Marsh. "Strong language." (*BBC online*, editorial 6/6/2006) on the case of Chris Moyles, Radio 1 presenter, using the term 'gay' in such a way: "[T]heir programme complaints committee rules that Radio 1's Chris Moyles wasn't being homophobic when he called a ringtone 'gay'. Young people – apparently – now routinely say 'gay' when they mean 'rubbish'. And the complaints committee is 'familiar with hearing this word in this context.'" See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theditors/2006/06/strong_language.html

village in Brandenburg", "my male colleagues in the police", "those in my home town in Sicily", and so on. Other times, specific social groups or institutions are pointed to as remaining hostile to homosexuality: "people on the countryside", "people in the suburbs", "the Catholic church", "Muslims", "the bourgeois society of Bordeaux" or "old people". Concerning these groups, optimism and the belief in progress are less unanimous: Some believe that resistance will eventually cede. Others think that the hard core of "homophobes" will never change.

4.2.5. It's not all about progress

Finally, in discussing the discourses about social change, a limited number of respondents also mention doubts about such a linear progress or refer to negative trends. Often, these doubts are accompanied by an account of positive developments in other parts of the interview. Gemma calls for caution and says that we are not immune to backlashes on the matter. She sees society, where she generally refers to Britain, as clearly more open. But she does not believe in future progress, instead outlining some broad pessimism that intolerance is bound to return:

Gemma (London, 39)

I think people are more accepting generally – of people. And that, you know, living let live sort of thing. – I say that with hesitation, because actually time goes on, I think the next generations are actually becoming less tolerant. [laughs] But less tolerant of everything. [...] I think a lot of it is all fed in by the media, 'cause especially in Britain the media is always so negative, everything has to be negative [...] and therefore, I think if you're brought up in this, - whereby it's ok to be intolerant, you know. [...] I think the tolerance that has been built up will decline. Hopefully not, but that's the way I feel. But then again that may be because I'm getting older. [laughs]

The role of the media is not quite clear in Gemma's discourse here, but it seems that she refers to the media as launching pessimism rather than as launching intolerance. While Gemma embraces the idea of social progress up to today, it is the future generation she has doubts about. It is interesting that she casts doubt on her view by referring to "getting older", implying that the older generations could be more pessimistic in their outlook, which indeed is what could partly be suggested in reading the material collected here. Simone instead describes the younger generation outright as less tolerant and abusive in using insults against gays:

⁶⁴ Original: "Les gens [...] ne changent pas d'opinion. S'ils ont changé d'opinion c'est qu'avant ils n'en avaient pas." (based on notes)

Simone (Berlin, 43)

I want to say something else, concerning the idea of being easier today. Well in fact one would just have to ask the young ladies and gentlemen [teenagers], because, because, what I then notice again is that when you now use public transport a bit, or on the street with some people like that, young people that walk along, well, homophobic jokes are still around, and it's partly children that happily tune into those aggressive jokes, well, probably because they hear it at home, I find that quite frightening. And there I also think, yes, how much has liberalization progressed in the meantime? Well, officially one always thinks that, and in TV it is treated more openly too. But as I said, when I sometimes listen to the ten-year-olds or whatever, and then hear, my God they speak in an extremely homophobic way, or poofs are used as insults, then I find it quite frightening. Well, that's something to add to the idea of – liberalization.⁶⁵

She contrasts an “official” way of portraying homosexuality, linked to “liberalization” (in Simone's terms) and being “easier”, and a social reality she experiences in public transport which is about “anti-gay and lesbian jokes” and homophobic insults.

On a lighter tone, Hans nuances the progress talk in seeing waves of greater acceptance rather than a linear development:

Hans (Berlin, 47)

[People] were much more tolerant in the seventies, because there was this bisexual phase, well with Bowie and Ziggy Stardust. [...] For many it was simply fashionable then to be at least bisexual. And there, well but it was then actually only tolerated by people who were my age, those who were in their 20s or 30, who were young and who were in the revolution stage of the previous 68 generation, [where], so to speak, anything was tolerated. And everything that was different was fashionable and great and, and ok.⁶⁶

A lot could be said about the question of toleration on the one hand, as Hans describes the 1970s in this passage,⁶⁷ and inclusion on the other, which could refer to the idea that traditional institutions are applied to lesbian and gay lifestyles. We have partly raised critical views on such an inclusion in the reviewing some anti-marriage positions. For now, in

⁶⁵ Original: “Ich möchte noch was sagen. Von wegen leichter sein. Mmm, also eigentlich müsste man eben da mal die jungen, jungen Damen und Herren befragen, weil, - was ich auch wiederum feststelle ist, wenn man jetzt so n bisschen die weiß ich nicht, öffentliche Verkehrsmittel oder, Straße mit so n paar Leuten, jungen Leuten, die langlaufen, also, schwulen- und lesbenfeindliche Witze gibt es also immer noch, und auch das Kinder teilweise da noch so fröhlich mit hinein, schlagen, also wahrscheinlich weil sie das aus dem Elternhaus hören, find ich dann schon erschreckend, also wo ich dann auch denke, ja, mmm, wie weit ist die Liberalisierung in der Zwischenzeit fortgeschritten. Also irgendwo offiziell denkt man das immer, und wird auch offener im Fernseh mit umgegangen und ähnliches. Aber wie gesagt, wenn ich mir manchmal so die, zehnjährigen oder so anhöre, und dann mitkriege, boar, da wird also schwulenfeindlich hoch drei geredet, oder Schwuchteln werden also, wird als Schimpfwort benutzt, dann find ich das auch wiederum ganz schön erschreckend. Also, - das noch mal zur, - Liberalisierung.”

⁶⁶ Original: “In den Siebzigern war es weitaus toleranter, weil da so ne, so ne Bisexuellen Phase eingetreten war, also so mit Bowie und Ziggy Stardust und irgendwie war das zu der Zeit sehr schick [...] Für viele war das einfach schick, zumindestens bi zu sein. Und, da, - aber da ist es im Grunde genommen nur toleriert worden von Leuten, die in meinem Alter waren, also, die, die über zwanzig dreißig war, was Jugend war und was eh so im Revoluzzer Stadium der vorgehenden 68er Generation, die sozusagen, da war eh alles toleriert. Und alles was anders war, war schick und toll und und ok.”

⁶⁷ On the development of the gay movement in Western Germany during the 1970s, see e.g. Michael Holy. “Ungelebte Ost/Westbeziehungen.” Grau, ed. (2001), *Schwulsein 2000*: 52-70, see pp. 56-58.

reviewing the main discourses on social change in the interview material, it will be concluded that a social progress discourse is a dominant trait in the interviews.

The question of the extent to which the lesbian and gay respondents in this study see such institutions, and marriage in particular, as a viable option for themselves will be the topic of the next section, which analyzes the views on opting for partnership registrations or marriage. In this section, in contrast to the first, the question is not whether there *should* be marriage *generally* available to same-sex couples, but instead, whether they would personally aim for marriage in their lives if it were legally available to them.

4.3. Would you want to marry?

Would you want to marry?

	Yes (+ symbolic / if symbolic)	Yes I would but not likely	Perhaps for pragmatic reasons	Yes but civil partnership better	No, don't think so
B	Hans	Thorsten	Katharina		Simone
	Jenny		Monika		Nadine
	Daniel		Sven		Petra
					Andreas
L	Mark	Owen	Gemma	Anne	Kevin
	Lasse				Gareth
	Harriet				Julia
	Jason				
	Miguel				
	Matthew				
R	Dario	Bianca	Gabriella		Michele
	Antonella		Mario		Raffaele
	Angelo				
	Carlo				
	Patti				
	Francseca				
	Claudia				
	Luisa				
	Marianna				
P	Fabienne	Antoine	Jacques	Nicole	
	Julien		Léa	Dorothee.Jérémy	
	Olivier				Richard

The discourses examined in sections 4.1 and 4.2 showed dominant common threads: there is a general approval of equal rights, and, as noted above, the approval of the reforms is virtually unanimous, in the sense that they are seen as moving into the right direction. Furthermore, there is a widely shared view of social progress towards the acceptance of homosexuality, despite discrepancies within this overall picture. This picture is very different when the respondents are asked about the use they would personally make of *marriage*, *Civil Partnership*, *Pacs* and *Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft*, or when they have to define the kind of partnership they would want to live. In the following two sections, thus, very diverse views on marriage and partnership projects will be presented.

Concerning the aim of marriage as a personal project, no clearly dominating majority discourse can be detected, as we can see in the table above. We have seen that the respondents often share a positive view of the consequences of legal recognition as regards the acceptance of gays and lesbian in society. While many fully embrace the idea of marrying or registering their relationship, and some have thought through and discussed the options and legal consequences with their partners, others reject the idea completely, irrespective of whether they are in a long-term relationship or not.

As the table shows, respondents in all four cities, and both male and female, fill the different typologies that have been laid out, from those who embrace marriage with its symbolic and traditional values on the one end, to those who reject marriage of civil partnership as an option for themselves at the other end of the spectrum. Besides “yes” and “no” responses to the question, three additional typologies have been identified, as based on the respondents’ discourses: some say that they like the idea, but regard it as unlikely that it would occur e.g. because they would not find the appropriate partner or because they would not be able to commit publicly; many are hesitant about the idea of marriage but stress that they would do it on practical or pragmatic grounds; some finally differentiate between marriage, which they reject, and civil unions, which they accept.⁶⁸

Various nuances come into play when the different legal conditions in the respective countries are taken into account. In Italy, respondents answered the question hypothetically or with

⁶⁸ As we will be discussed below, this discourse was mainly linked to French respondents who considered *Pacs* and marriage as different types of institutions. The three respondents who have been grouped under this typology are all French, Jacques, Dorothée and Anne, where Anne is a French woman who lives in London and was very familiar with the French and the British debates and institutional options.

reference to "marrying abroad". In this section, the discourses will be presented according to normative typologies that represent the reasoning and the values that respondents attach to the institutions; less reference is made to concrete legal options and consequences. Many respondents refer to "marriage" (instead of Civil Partnership for example) even though it is not an option in their country for them to "marry" a partner of the same sex. The marriage vocabulary is indeed used throughout by German ("heiraten", "Ehe", "Hochzeit") and British ("marry", "marriage", "wedding") respondents for entering into a civil union. Such usages of the vocabulary and at times faulty knowledge of the laws will not be challenged here; quite on the contrary, they will be looked at to point to the normative underpinnings and connotations that are of central importance to the inquiry.

4.3.1. "Gay marriage" and civil partnership: embraced and appropriated

Registered partnership and same-sex marriage as an option⁶⁹ face a vast amount of different lived situations, desires, life plans, practical and ideological constraints. Many, though not all, consider partnership institutions as being an option for themselves. And this is both the case for those who are in a long-term relationship and have discussed it, formulating concrete plans with their partner, and for those who think of it as an option or an aim to pursue in the long-run, e.g. once they have found the right person.

Anne and her girlfriend Rebecca have been together for five years, currently live together, and have already decided to sign a Civil Partnership as soon as the law takes effect in December 2005. For Anne, this decision is linked to various motivations, including pragmatic, moral, symbolic, and political ones. She invokes inheritance rights, the societal importance and the celebration as a rite in itself:

Anne (London, 35)

A: I own my flat. If I die I would want [Rebecca] to inherit it, without paying all the charges on it. So, it would be for a financial reason, clearly. - And also for a question of, - recognition. - Moral recognition. - To be on an equal footing with straight couples, that's important. So, yes, we will sign it. - I think it will be effective from the fifth of December. [...] We are very sure about our relationship. So there's no doubt about it. [...] Now that it will be possible to do it we have to do it, because if now nobody uses it, if no one does it, it will affect the value of the act itself. [...] Oh yes. I think we will have a party. Yes. Oh yes, it will be a celebration. That's the beautiful thing about marriage, to be able to get the people together who otherwise would never meet, but who have counted in the lives of the two persons. To get everyone under the same roof, on that unique occasion. So, yes, clearly, of course, it will be a celebration of our

⁶⁹ For the interviews in Rome, the question is hypothetically addressed, and so is the question on *marriage* itself in all four cities.

partnership, and of the friendships that we have made on the way, [...] all those who want to come.

FJ: Yes. [laughs]

A: The family, yes, the family, friends, the close friends, the friends who've been important, [...] to get them together and have a party.⁷⁰

In this extract, signing a Civil Partnership has both a symbolic value ("moral recognition", "on an equal footing") and a material value ("inherit [...] without paying all the taxes"). There is also a political motivation in the argument that "if now nobody uses it [...] it will affect the value of the act itself". A firm commitment to the relationship ("to be sure about our relationship") is seen as a prerequisite, and a wedding ceremony is described in analogy to traditional heterosexual weddings, in the spirit of bringing together the relatives and friends from both sides ("to get everyone under the same roof").⁷¹

The act of registering a partnership or marrying is often very differently connoted. Some see it as a contractual union without aspiring to values such as monogamy or lifelong commitment. Others fully embrace traditional values and the romantic view of marriage, such as Matthew, who has been cohabiting with his partner of five years. Only Matthew's boyfriend seems to still have some doubts:

Matthew (London, 29)

Not right now. But, at some point yes, that will be an option. [...] He's not a romantic type of person, I am. I love the idea of, not just the idea of getting married, but the commitment that it brings. And yes, so does he. So, at some point when it's a lot less, more, when it's a lot more accepted by society, I think that's when he will probably nod his head. Or when I just force him to do it. No, that's a joke. [...] Knowing that we are cemented to spend the rest of our lives together, gives me peace of mind, will give him peace of mind. [...] It's just, well, that's us, and this is us, we are a union, we are a couple, and to the whole world: "This is who we are."

Matthew argues in favour of the symbolic commitment that marriage represents. A Civil Partnership for him would imply just that, and he describes marrying as making the couple

⁷⁰ Anne is a French woman who had been living in London for ten years at the time of interview – the interview was however held in French. Original: "Je possède mon appartement. Si je meurs j'aimerais bien que [Rebecca] en hérite sans payer de frais. Donc ça serait, oui, pour une question financière, clairement. - Et aussi pour une question de reconnaissance - morale. - Nous mettre sur un pied d'égalité avec les couples hétérosexuels, c'est important. Donc oui, on va signer le, -. Je crois qu'il vient, il rentre en vigueur le cinq décembre. [...] Si maintenant il est possible de le faire, il faut le faire. Parce que si personne ne l'utilise, ça va affecter la valeur de, pardon c'est pas très français ce que je dis, mais affecter [avoir des conséquences sur] la valeur de l'acte en lui-même, [...] Ah oui, je pense qu'on ferait une fête. Oui oui. Ah oui, ce serait une célébration. C'est la beauté du mariage, c'est pouvoir réunir des gens qui se rencontreront jamais, mais qui ont compté dans la vie des deux personnes, et de mettre tout le monde sous un même toit pour cette unique occasion. Donc, ah oui, clairement, clairement, ça sera une célébration de notre couple, et puis des amitiés qu'on s'est faites sur le chemin [...] Ceux qui veulent venir. -FJ : Oui. [rire] - L : La famille, oui, le, la famille, les amis, les amis proches, les amis qui ont beaucoup compté. [...] De les mettre ensemble et de faire la fête."

⁷¹ Compare e.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), where he describes marriage as the trading of partners (women) creating a link and solidarity between different groups.

"cemented to spend the rest of our lives together". "Cement" here represents a lifelong commitment and relationship security ("peace of mind"). What Anne called being "sure" about the relationship is here seen as enforced through the institution of Civil Partnership. He also sees it as a symbolic announcement to the community ("to the whole of the world") and as a "romantic" act, as his support for the idea is linked to him being a romantic "type of person" in contrast to his boyfriend, who is not. The timing of his "marriage" with his boyfriend is also seen as connected to a higher degree of social acceptance. This means that such a public step would only be made by his boyfriend in the event that he were no longer afraid of the social stigma attached to being publicly gay: "when it's a lot more accepted by society [...] that's when he will probably nod his head". Unlike Anne, Matthew does not refer to practical, material benefits.

Anne and Matthew draw up quite concrete plans about formalizing their present long-term relationships. But the idea of formalizing a partnership is also something that many singles envisage as a perspective for the future which depends on finding the right person and sometimes on the right moment in life to "settle down". Fabienne sees the Pacs as something she would aim for if she had a "stable relationship", as long as there is "real love", and it is not just done for specific advantages:

Fabienne (Paris, 55):

F: For me the question is not really relevant now, because I am not in a love relationship that develops quite in that way. But I think that if I had a stable relationship, yes. Well, also because of my age again, yes, I would quite like things to be institutionalized, concerning our property, things we have, well, everything we will put together. In the end, yes, the Pacs is a good thing, a very good thing. [laughs]

FJ: Is it a perspective or also an aim in way?

F: No, it's not an aim.

FJ: Or a possibility?

F: It's a possibility. And as long as there is no real love, where I tell myself that I will commit to that person for a long time, as long as that's not there I wouldn't do it, that's clear. I wouldn't do it for the papers either, because I'm not European. [Fabienne is from Switzerland] But, no, because I think it's a love tie after all. And I take it as a rather serious thing, the Pacs. – Yes. [laughs]⁷²

⁷² Original: "F: Pour moi, la question ne se pose pas puisque je n'ai pas de relation amoureuse qui est sur ce chemin-là. Mais, oui, je pense que si j'avais une relation stable, de fait aussi de mon âge une fois de plus, oui, j'aimerais que les choses soient bien institutionnalisées, par rapport à nos avoirs, à nos acquis, enfin tout ce que va mettre ensemble. Enfin voilà. Oui, le Pacs c'est bien, très bien. [rire] - FJ: C'est une perspective ou aussi un but d'une certaine manière? - F: Non, ce n'est pas un but. - FJ: Ou une possibilité? - F: C'est une possibilité. Et temps qu'il n'y a pas vraiment un amour réel, où je me dis je vais m'engager avec cette personne pour longtemps, je ne le ferais pas, non, c'est clair. Je le ferais pas pour les papiers non plus, même si j'aimerais bien, parce que je suis pas européenne [elle est suisse]. Mais, non, parce que je crois que c'est un lien d'amour quand même. Et le prends assez sérieusement le Pacs. Oui. [rire]"

The way that her relationship to Nicole is going does not allow Fabienne to consider the *Pacs* in her present relationship, but she does consider it as “a possibility”. She lists pragmatic reasons (“property, things we have”), but highlights “love” as what it really is about: “I think it’s a love tie after all.” She is not a French citizen, and denies specifically the idea that she might “do it for the papers” – she thereby explicitly excludes practical benefits from having a decisive role in looking for an institutionalization of her relationship.

All younger respondents, as we shall see in 4.4., indeed take the idea of forming a long-term relationship as an aim of what they are looking for, sometimes immediately, sometimes at a projected later stage in life. And often, the idea of some legal recognition goes with it. Daniel, who is single, compares the moment of deciding to opt for a registered partnership with leaving the flirt market in order to enter the safe haven of marriage:

Daniel (Berlin, 26)

Well, yes, I can imagine it for myself. But at the same time, it’s a question whether, well, to find somebody, I think that’s, whether that will happen remains to be seen. [...] Let’s say that at the moment, I don’t think about it at all. But in general, I would say ok, a registered partnership would at some stage be something to aim for. Well, you know, it always depends what the situation is like then, in order to, so to say, enter the safe haven of marriage, and one is off the market. [laughs]⁷³

“To find somebody” is the crucial argument in Daniel’s account. While at present he does not “think about it at all”, in hypothetical future tense, it “would at some stage be something to aim for.” The image of the “safe haven” also implies an arrival or aim of life, and Daniel thereby embraces the idea of an institutionalized partnership.

Antonella, in Rome, lives with her girlfriend, and speaks about the possibility of marriage in future. Like Anne, she points to the importance of being sure about her relationship, but also of “knowing well what she wants”:

Antonella (Rome, 24)

A: I mean a straight couple marries. Therefore I don’t see for what reason a gay couple shouldn’t be able to do it.

FJ: And you yourself, marriage for example, would it be an idea for you, in the long-term?

A: Yes.

FJ: Yes? Mm. Do you also think about it with your girlfriend now?

⁷³ Original: “Also selbst vorstellen kann ich’s für mich schon, wobei, es ist immer ne Frage ob sich, also jemand zu finden, das ist glaub ich, ob sich das ergibt, das muss ich mal kucken. [...] Sagen wir mal, ich mach mir im Moment überhaupt keine Gedanken. Aber es ist schon so dass man vielleicht sagt, ok, - eingetragene Partnerschaft, - wäre irgendwann vielleicht anzustreben, - ne, also, ist immer abhängig davon, wie es dann aussieht, aber dass man sozusagen in den Hafen der, in Anführungszeichen, Ehe einläuft, und raus aus dem Markt ist [lacht].”

A: Yes. Well, it springs to mind. Yes. That means, I wouldn't do it today, because it is too early, because I don't know yet what I want. But yes, I would easily to it sometime in the future.

FJ: And also in church then? [as she had mentioned earlier on]

A: Yes, also in church.⁷⁴

As she had previously mentioned in the interview, marrying in Church was of central importance to her, and her desire to marry is closely connected to the symbolic and religious aspect of it. She confirms the idea of marrying in Church, if it were possible (she is Catholic), and says that the idea of marriage does "spring to mind". The fact that she sees the present as "too early" refers both to being young and to her present relationship.

The prospects for future plans, as we can see in the extracts from Daniel and Antonella, do not necessarily differ much as to whether the idea is seen as unfeasible in the present either because there is no partner (yet) or because of the absence of the legal possibility. In Antonella's case, the fact that she is in a stable relationship and living with her partner makes her situation appear as potentially more adapted to such a prospect. However, as a first reason not to do it "today", she states the question of "what I want" rather than the absence of the option in law and within the Catholic Church.

Luisa and Marianna have been together for five years but live with their respective parents. Luisa answers the question about marriage by referring to the possibility of marrying in the Netherlands or in Spain, while Marianna judges that option "not to have value":

Luisa (Rome 29) and Marianna (Rome, 27)

FJ: [Claudia] said that she would also like to marry, is it like that for you as well? For you, is it something that springs to mind, the idea of marrying?

L: No, I would like to, but here in Italy it's not possible. I would have to go to Spain, to Holland.

M: Yes but that not worth anything.

L: Yes I know, but anyway.

M: Me yes.

L: But here.

M: Me, when, when it exists I will marry. End of story. [laughs] Alone? No.

FJ: Have you already talked about it also in the couple, about that...

M: Yes, we touch upon it, but until the thing is not actually possible I don't like to talk about it more than that.

L: Yes, we did talk about it!

FJ: What, what did you say about it when you had talked about it?

L: Oh well, I asked her if she would like it, she told me yes – that's all.

⁷⁴ Original: "A: Cioè, una, una coppia etero si sposa. Per cui, io non vedo per quale motivo una coppia gay non possa fare. - FJ: E te stessa, allora, il matrimonio ad esempio? Sarebbe un ideale per te, al lungo tempo? - A: Sì. - FJ: Sì? Mm. - Lo, - ci pensi anche con la tua ragazza adesso? - A: Sì. Cioè, mi viene in mente. Sì. Cioè, non lo farei oggi, - perché è troppo presto, perché non so ancora bene cosa voglio. Però sì, lo farei tranquillamente un domani. - FJ: E anche in chiesa allora? [as she had mentioned earlier on] - A: Sì. Anche in chiesa."

M: No, nothing more.⁷⁵

In this passage, in a certain way, the absence of the legal possibility seems to make the project of marrying even more concrete, as the conditioning of the marriage is seen as depending solely on the introduction of same-sex marriage: "When it will exist I will marry. End of story." Specifics are not discussed, but the couple says it has already spoken about such a project for their relationship, and marrying abroad, as suggested by Luisa, is dismissed by Marianna as "not having value", whereby both practical advantages and symbolic recognition may be meant.

While the option of marrying in another country is mentioned but largely dismissed by Marianna and Luisa, others embrace such an option with a far-reaching symbolic value for their relationship. Mark for example speaks of an important episode of his past relationship in which he had refused to "marry" his partner in Las Vegas – a 'fake' marriage that would not have any legal value whatsoever,⁷⁶ but which was discussed between the two partners as an option for their couple because there was no Civil Partnership in the UK yet at the time:

Mark (London, 40)

M: We went to Vegas probably the first time about three years ago, [and] the second time we were there, as we were planning our trip, he said: "Shall we get married while we're there?" – And I just said no. Cause I didn't feel as though he was committed enough to me, although I was to him. I was very, totally monogamous to him. And by that point of our relationship he'd already cheated on me. So that's why I said no. And it actually, it hurt his feeling that I said "no, I won't get married to you". But I said, you know, "let's talk about it later on in our relationship". – And it never really cropped up again apart from – every time we fell out he would say: "Well you wouldn't marry me anyway in Vegas. I asked you to marry me in Vegas."

FJ: [laughs]

M: "And you wouldn't do it." – So that was it. [...] But, if I was with the right person and they were truly committed to me and I knew that was it, yeah I would, yeah, I would love to get married yeah.

⁷⁵ Original: "FJ: [Claudia] ha detto vorrebbe anche sposarsi, per te è anche così? Per te sarebbe un'idea, che ti viene in mente, di sposarti? - L: No, a me piacerebbe, però, qui in Italia non è possibile. Dovrei andare in Spagna, in Olanda. - M: Sì ma questo non avrebbe valore, cioè. - L Eh, lo so, però. - M Io sì. - L Qui però. M: Io qui quando, quando ci sarà mi sposerò. Basta. [ride] Da sola? No. - FJ: Ne avete già parlato anche nella coppia, di queste ... - M: Sì, aggenato, ma finché la cosa non è realizzabile nei fatti non mi va neanche di parlarne più di tanto. - L Sì, ne abbiamo parlato! - FJ: Cosa, cosa ne avete detto quando ne avete parlato? - L: Eh be', io gli ho chiesto se a lei piacerebbe, mi ha detto di sì, - niente. - M No, niente di più."

⁷⁶ Unlike in eight US states (including Massachusetts, Vermont and Hawaii), there is no legal recognition of same-sex partnership in Nevada. "Easy marriage" in Las Vegas here instead probably refers to the loose marriage licence rules, and particularly the possibility of "instant marriage" due to the absence of a waiting period in Nevada. But Nevada, as 27 other US states, adopted the anti-gay-marriage constitutional amendment in 2000, which ensures that legal challenges on the grounds of constitutional rights to equality are unsuccessful (see e.g. www.humanrights.gov.au/samesex/submissions/328.doc). The discussion between Mark and his boyfriend at the time therefore is purely hypothetical, even though it is unclear to what extent they were aware of it.

Mark's discussion with his boyfriend at the time considered the possibility of marrying "in Vegas", but as we see, the implications of that discussion are presented as being equivalent to a "real" marriage proposal. Mark rejected the idea because he felt the relationship was not ready for such a "commitment", despite the absence of any legal commitment. The fact that the boyfriend seemed not committed enough and had "cheated" on him was the reason for rejecting the idea of marriage, while the boyfriend later claimed that his rejection of marrying "in Vegas" was, according to Mark, proof of an absence of commitment on his part, of which he would accuse him when they had an argument. In this case, quite differently from the above cases, the purely symbolic "marriage" abroad is put on a par with a legally effective marriage in their own country as far as the consequences *within* the relationship are concerned.

All the discourses quoted above have pointed to some desire to marry and linked marriage, or Civil Partnership, to the value of commitment: it appears, in a sense, to be an aim. Sometimes the main symbolic value is the one it expresses to the partner, sometimes to society, the state or to family and friends. Sometimes the legal consequences are placed at the forefront and the stability of the relationship is seen as a prerequisite for it. At other times, the desirability of marrying is wholly detached from any legal impact, as in this last extract. Most often, the legal or material advantages and the symbolic value are linked, and appear as more or less central, depending on how the question is being asked.

In contrast to this, some respondents do not present marriage as an "aim" but rather as something that could well happen in the long-run, as one element of a long-term relationship:

Mario (Rome, 25)

[Imagining the future, one day...]. I live with someone, we are together. The years pass by, time passes. And hey, we want to marry, I am fine with you, live well with you, share a place with you. So lets marry. Then yes. For the rest then, problems or not problems, no, because in any case, marriage is just a clause for me, it's simply a clause. There are so many people who live together without being married, and they lead exactly the same life of the married ones. But they live together. Therefore, there is no pro or con. The only pro is only that you are there, you have written somewhere that you are married to him, end of story. And you just change names [laughs]. But no, nothing else changes, there is nothing else. That means I don't see [anything else]. If it had to happen, ok, but I'm not looking for it. Absolutely [not].⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Original: "[Immaginando il futuro: un giorno] Io vivo con una persona, stiamo insieme. Passano gli anni, passa il tempo. Eh, oh, ci vogliamo sposare, sto bene con te, vivo bene con te, convivo con te. Eh, sposiamoci. E allora sì. Se no, poi, problemi o non problemi no, perché poi comunque, il matrimonio è semplicemente una clausola. Per me è semplicemente una clausola. C'è tanta gente che convive senza essere sposata, e fanno la stessa identica vita da sposati. Però convivono. - Perciò ne sta né pro né contro. L'unico pro è solo che stai lì, - hai scritto da qualche parte che tu stai sposato con lui, stop. E cambi soltanto cognome. [ride] Però non cambia altro, non ci sta nient'altro. - Cioè, non, - lo vedo, se dovesse succedere ok, ma non lo cerco. Assolutamente."

In Mario's discourse, still based on the assumption that same-sex marriage would be introduced in Italy, he presents stages in life in which "time passes" and marriage becomes "just a clause" ("semplicemente una clausola"). He sees it as a quasi-natural occurrence: "If it were to happen" ("se dovesse succedere"). Even in the grammatical structure of his discourse - from first person to third person to impersonal second person - his personal account of future options flows into general observations of how people's lives would generally develop. Being married or not is the same for him: "you just change names" ("cambi solo cognome"). He points out that he does not aim for it, but embraces the idea in so far as he finds it acceptable ("ok") that it should happen. In the typologies, Mario is listed in the "yes to marriage" category as he embraces the idea as a perspective for his life. But his narrative is quite different to the others above: he accepts the institution as a possibility for himself, but does not accord it any positive value, be it symbolic or material. In this light, he seems to embrace it merely as based on social norms of how people would generally live throughout the years according to his observation. Mario's discourse thus represents an expectation rather than a desire; but remarkably, this expectation corresponds to that of a heterosexual norm of how most younger Europeans today live their private lives: relationship – cohabitation – marriage.⁷⁸

As we saw in Anne's and Matthew's accounts, the material and pragmatic benefits that are seen in the prospects of marriage can very well be combined with symbolic values that are seen in such an act: be it the celebration of the act itself or the commitment it represents. However, in the following, a type of discourse will be presented that explicitly rejects the symbolic connotations of marrying or the registration of partnerships. Instead it describes the practical benefits as a reason to do it *despite* a negative judgment on symbolic aspects of marriage.

4.3.2. Pragmatic approaches

For the respondents who take a pragmatic approach of this kind, when the question of marriage is concerned, a range of different negative connotations and value judgments come into play. In deciding whether marriage or registered partnership could become an option, different rationales come into effect, where pragmatic reasons and symbolic interpretations compete with one another. Katharina for example does not like the idea of a symbolic act of

⁷⁸ E.g. Eurostat yearbook 2003: 88.

commitment mediated by the state, but completely accepts this option when pragmatic reasons are at stake:

Katharina (Berlin, 22)

Mm, well, at the moment I can't quite imagine that, but perhaps at some stage. Well, I think, it would then be an economic factor for me, mainly. For the rest, err, I don't know, I can say it in this silly way: for the rest I don't need to get my love certified. I don't need to. So that's why, in this respect it is superfluous for me, but, as I said, [there are] economic advantages and for the rest I find it quite good that it is possible in law.⁷⁹

Katharina unambiguously points to an "economic factor" and "economic advantages". For anything else she would not need to "get her love certified". In Katharina's discourse, the rejection of a symbolic nature of marriage is thereby implicitly contained in the repeated phrase: "I don't need [that]". A symbolic value through which an institution became involved with her "love" would in her eyes be simply "superfluous" ("überflüssig").

Other respondents very outspokenly reject marriage on ideological grounds – without excluding the idea of the pragmatic and practical use of a registered partnership option for themselves. The institution is often reinterpreted and appropriated according to pragmatic needs and personal ideologies. Gabriella for example identifies with a feminist perspective against institutionalizing relationships, but subsequently limits her critique as being dependent on the way in which marriage would be used:

Gabriella (Rome, 39)

In fact, I am against marriage – as such. I have always been against it. – But in the sense that I believe that love cannot be quantified. It cannot be sanctified by a signature. – But marriage is a good thing though, to the extent that, when, let's say, you really want to leave an inheritance, leave your belongings to a person you have loved for all your life. In that case, you leave a signature – at the legal level! – So, just as there is marriage for heterosexuals, there has to be the Pacs for homosexuals. Or even for unmarried couples.⁸⁰

Thus, in this view, partnership registration is seen as fully justified and as a realistic option when used pragmatically. She clearly juxtaposes the specific legal consequences with the negative symbolic or here also religious idea that marriage would "sanctify" "love". It is in the

⁷⁹ Original: "Mmh, also - momentan kann ich mir das weniger vorstellen, ähm, vielleicht irgendwann, also, - ich denke, das wäre für mich so n ökonomischer Faktor für mich wahrscheinlich größtenteils. Ansonsten, ähm, ich weiß nicht, ich sags mal, äh, ganz blöd, ich brauche ansonsten mir meine Liebe nich bescheinigen zu, zu lassen. Brauch ich nicht. Also deshalb, unter diesem Aspekt ist es für mich überflüssig, aber, ähm, wie gesagt, ökonomische Vorteile und ansonsten find ich das auch ganz positiv, dass das in der Gesetzgebung möglich ist."

⁸⁰ Within this extract, marriage and Pacs are used as equivalent. Original: "In realtà sono contrario al matrimonio. Di suo, di fatto. Lo sono sempre stata, contraria al matrimonio. Però nel senso che, secondo me, l'amore non può essere quantificato. Non può essere sancito da una firma. Però, è giusto, invece, il matrimonio nella misura in cui quando tu sei, diciamo, vuoi veramente lasciare la tua eredità, i tuoi beni a una persona che hai amato per tutta la vita, allora in quel caso, metti questa firma al livello legale! Quindi, c'è il matrimonio per gli eterosessuali, ci deve essere il Pacs per gli omosessuali. O anche le coppie solamente di fatto."

symbolic sense that her first reaction is spelled out, namely that she is “against marriage”. The legal aspects instead are a “good thing”, and hence also marriage, to the extent that one focuses on the legal consequences alone.

The pragmatic discourse is not always so categorical in denouncing marriage as a negative thing. Sometimes it is rather a personal reluctance that is referred to in a vaguer manner. Antoine for example presented similar views in a less decisive way (“je ne sais pas”):

Antoine (Paris, 50)

FJ: For yourself, can you imagine a sort of formalization of your partnership, Pacs or other, or marriage if it were possible, and if you were in a partnership?

A: I don't know. Quite honestly, I don't know. If it's to be of use to – if a formalization is helpful to the partnership life, why not. But I don't feel the need. And I'd rather avoid it. Then again, if it's in order to – be left in peace – by the family, or for the relationship, or to make things easier, why not. But a priori I don't know. I don't like the idea to be in a mould, formatted, whatever mould it is. So a priori it's no - unless it is very pragmatic.⁸¹

Antoine's discourse is similar to Gabriella's to the extent that a negative connotation (“I'd rather avoid it”, “je préférerais l'éviter”) is juxtaposed to a pragmatic use that he can imagine and accept (“unless it is very pragmatic”, “sauf [...] que ça soit très pragmatique”). Marriage is described as a “mould” (“moule”) – a form he would be pressed into in order to conform to mainstream societal norms. But two differences stand out: first, his rejection of marriage is more hesitant and expressed as relating in an individualized manner to his own personality; it has nothing of Gabriella's more universal formulation of being “against marriage”. Secondly, his “pragmatic” reasons are very different, as they do not appear to be of a material kind. Rather, they are reasons which aim at fulfilling the expectations of others, i.e. for the partner or the family: to be “helpful” (“rendre service”), to be “left in peace” (“avoir la paix”), to “make things easier” (“simplifier les choses”). He gives weight to the consideration that the expectations of the partner will be a main practical concern, overshadowing his own negative connotations that other reasons would not seem to outweigh.

Sven, whose position we had already looked at in greater depth in chapter 3, provides yet another pragmatic reason:

⁸¹ Original : “FJ: Pour toi-même tu peux t'imaginer une forme de formalisation de ton couple, donc Pacs ou autre, ou le mariage si ça existait, et si tu étais en couple ? - A: Je sais pas. Très honnêtement je sais pas. Si ça doit rendre service à, si une formalisation doit rendre service à la vie du couple pourquoi pas. Mais j'en ressents pas le besoin. Et je préférerais l'éviter. Maintenant si c'est pour, euh, - avoir la paix - par rapport à une famille, ou par rapport à une relation ou pour simplifier les choses, pourquoi pas. Mais a priori je sais pas, moi j'aime pas l'idée qu'on me formate [...] dans un moule, donc en fait, j'ai pas envie d'être dans un moule, formaté, quel qu'il soit. Donc, a priori non. Sauf à l'idée – que ça soit très pragmatique, ben voilà.”

Sven (Berlin, 39)

If the question of children came up [...] I would surely look into that. Otherwise I have to say quite honestly that marriage for me is not that great a thing.⁸²

For him, marriage is thus negatively connoted, but children are presented as a pragmatic reason for such a commitment – and the only reason for considering it. Here, similarly to Antoine but also to Anne, who had spoken of the rights her partner would have, it is the well-being of others that is seen as the main motivation – the child's benefit in Sven's account.

In the "pragmatic" discourse we have looked at, some negative feeling towards marriage has been expressed throughout. However, it is not the idea of romantic love or long-term commitment more generally that is refuted or doubted. Instead, the negative connotation associated with marriage is linked to the idea that the state or any authority gets involved ("get approved", "be sanctified", "in a mould"). But here, as we have seen, pragmatic reasons of different kinds potentially outweigh this a priori reluctance to allow the state to become involved in matters of love.

4.3.3. Registered partnership or marriage?

The preceding two sections have considered the reasons why respondents might (potentially) opt for marrying or registering their partnership with a *Pacs* or Civil Partnership. So far, thus, in the structure of how the discourses have been presented, no difference has been drawn, because the discourses have been analyzed on the basis of what has been brought up by the respondents themselves; and many did not substantially differentiate between the two. While these views differ in that they focus on love commitment in the first case and on a pragmatic reasoning in the second, they have in common that they do see the institutions of *Pacs* and *Eingetragene Partnerschaft* as an equivalent to marriage: the critique and the positive judgment are the same that would be made to marriage. In judging the institutions, they do not differentiate between them on the basis of different values being attached to each of them. In part, this can be linked to the observation that the precise legal implications are unknown to the respondents and are looked at in depth only once registration becomes a realistic project. For other respondents, on the contrary, it is the difference to marriage that guides the embracing or rejection of Civil Partnership or the *Pacs* as an institution. In other terms, for them "marriage" or another form of registration differ very fundamentally in value.

⁸² Original: "Wenn das Thema Kinder aufs Tablett käme, [...] also da würde ich mich dann sicherlich drum kümmern. Ansonsten muss ich ganz ehrlich sagen, äh, ist die Ehe für mich jetzt nicht so was dolles."

Indeed, the fact that many respondents do not specifically argue that they would rather marry than have another form of partnership registration could seem surprising if compared for example to a court case that (which however occurred after the interviews were being conducted) that has been highly publicized in the UK, in which two women who had married in Canada claimed their marriage should be recognized as marriage rather than as Civil Partnership.⁸³ As one of them argued: “it sends out a message that lesbian and gay marriages are inferior.”⁸⁴ We have however seen in the normative discourses, especially in 4.1.4, that the equality argument led a number of respondents to say that anything less than strict equality would not go far enough (Kevin, Léa and Monika were quoted there). Some others explicitly argued that a different name, such as Civil Partnership, “does not really matter”, as Owen for example:

Owen (London, 26)

What the union is called then doesn't really matter. I mean, if a heterosexual couple gets married in a registry office, that's a civil union. And, you can call it marriage by default. Nobody bats an eyelid, and I don't think that gay people should necessarily be arguing for it to be called marriage, I think that's stupid, it's pointless. I think to have it regulated in law is good enough. But the thing as well is that I don't really [think] at all the connotation of marriage, I don't think necessarily fits with gay partnerships either.

Owen regards Civil Partnership as sufficient, and debates over what it should be called are characterized as “stupid” and “pointless”. This indifference (“nobody bats an eyelid”) is however then subtly backed up by the view that gay partnerships (referring to male gays mainly in this case) are seen as not really “fitting” the “connotation of marriage”, where Owen later refers to traditional understandings of monogamous marriage. In other terms, if there is a difference between marriage and civil partnership, for Owen it is an appropriate one that for gays avoids traditional references to “heterosexual” marriage.

The difference on the personal level, as on the normative one in 4.1., is more often and more clearly pronounced in many of the French respondents' discourses. Also, out of the four countries, it is also only in France that an alternative verb to marrying, *pacser*, is widely used – hence in the other countries the hypothetical discourses to the idea to “marry” in the future often referred to the idea of signing a Civil Partnership or Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft, or an imagined comparable institution in Italy, while this was never the

⁸³ Wilkinson v Kitzinger & Ors [2006] EWHC 2022 (Fam) (31 July 2006). URL: <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Fam/2006/2022.html>

⁸⁴ Sue Wilkinson as quoted by the BBC, *BBC online* 31/7/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/north_yorkshire/5230708.stm

case in France. In France, the Pacs were presented on the political level as fundamentally different from marriage. Most respondents endorsed this distinction fully and would never refer to signing a Pacs as "marrying".

Julien, for example, says specifically that he would not sign a Pacs, but that it "would be a different matter" were there "gay marriage":

Julien (Paris, 29)

At the moment it would have to be a no. The Pacs is completely inappropriate. It's an administrative formality. If one day they introduce gay marriage it would be different. In that case it's being like everyone else. That would be a good thing and then it would make sense on the personal level.⁸⁵

For Julien, the rejection is based on the difference there is between the Pacs and marriage. Rather than being positively recognized, it seems, it would result in a humiliating "formalité administrative" which denied him the chance of being "like everyone else". The symbolic aspect of *being at the same level* is thereby on what the "sense on the personal level" depends. At the same time, in the term "inappropriate" ("inadapté"), Julien seems also to refer to material benefits. In Germany and Italy as well, some respondents criticized registered partnership or Pacs on those grounds. For example, we saw a similar reaction, more focused on the absence of material benefits, in Monika's evaluation of the Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft ("all rubbish", see 4.1.4). For Patti, by contrast, it is the connotation of marriage as a "solid" institution that trumps over other forms of registered partnership:

Patti (Rome, 38)

FJ: For you would it be better to have marriage or something like the Pacs, what would be more...

P: I would want marriage. It's more solid.⁸⁶

Here, "solidity", which is not specified further by Patti, seems to refer to the societal baggage the institution brings, the material aspects of it, as well as the binding force it could have on the partners within it. As we saw in chapter 3, others, such as Dorothée, view precisely such "solidity" as worrying and prefer a "lighter" form of institutionalization – the Pacs can thus be read as a more modern form of "marriage light" that is better adapted to societal trends concerning partnership. As we saw in chapter 3, Dorothée argued along these lines:

⁸⁵ Original: "Actuellement ça serait non. Le Pacs, c'est complètement inadapté. C'est une formalité administrative. Si un jour ils font le mariage homo, ce serait une autre chose. Dans ce cas-là, c'est comme tout le monde. Ce serait une bonne chose et alors cela prendrait un sens au niveau personnel."

⁸⁶ Original: "FJ: Per te è meglio avere il matrimonio, o qualcosa come il, come il Pacs, che sarebbe più ...
P: Vorrei il matrimonio. E più solido."

Dorothée (Paris, 26)

[In the Pacs] I don't see disadvantages, because it's something that is very easy to break, unlike marriage. I've always been scared of marriage. [...] The pacs is a bit lighter, [...] that's good.⁸⁷

What we have seen here, and in the parallel analysis in chapter 3, is how the difference between what marriage represents on the one hand, and what a different institution such as the Pacs represents on the other, can be interpreted very differently. In the first case, the difference is seen as a negative: as long as lesbians and gays are not treated as being the same, they remain inferior. Any fewer rights which lesbians and gays attain through a different institution make the institution flawed.⁸⁸ In the second case, marriage is seen as a bad thing to start with, and thereby a different status and a different set of rights are seen as an advantage of the new institution, which allows for shaking off the negative connotations that marriage has. In this context, the Pacs adds another specificity compared to the British and German cases, as the institution is also open to partners of the opposite sex (as it is in the Netherlands as well). In this sense, Dorothée for instance can argue in favour of the opening up of marriage on the basis of equality, can imagine being able to choose between the two in future, and still prefer the lesser set of rights the Pacs represents for herself – a position that would involve more hypothetical contortions in the other three countries.⁸⁹

While Dorothée judged marriage negatively but embraced the idea of the Pacs, for others the anti-marriage discourse extended to any type of partnership institution. As in the previous section, many points will recall aspects of the discourses discussed in 4.1.6., but the focus lies on the personal usage that people envisage. Nevertheless, the two perspectives do not always mirror one another, as the equality discourse described above was dominant even for those who personally strongly objected to the idea of marrying.

4.3.4. "Not for me"

As indicated in the table at the beginning of section 4.3., a large number of respondents are opposed to the idea of marrying or registering their partnership. While often, critical ideas about marriage did not exclude the idea that marrying could be an option at some stage or

⁸⁷ Original: "[Pour le Pacs, des] inconvénients j'en vois pas, parce que c'est quelque chose de très facile à détruire, contrairement au mariage. Moi, c'est toujours le mariage qui m'a toujours affolée. [...] Le pacs c'est [...] plus léger [...] c'est bien."

⁸⁸ As the specific rights the different institutions involve is not the focus of this study, this aspect needs to partly remain bracketed with the general observations that have been made as to how the institutions are distinguished by the respondents themselves.

under specific circumstances, some respondents maintained an anti-marriage position throughout as far as their own lives were concerned, i.e. they would not want to sign any type of registered partnership for any reason.

Michele (Rome, 50) and Raffaele (Rome, 27)⁹⁰

FJ: Would you want to use a form of pacs or marriage? What advantages or disadvantages do you see in registering a relationship in this way?

M: For me only disadvantages.

R: Why?

P: Personally. Well because I wouldn't feel free anymore.

R: With marriage?

M: Yes. Absolutely. Exactly freer also legally. Also in things. I am someone who is not attached to anything. Therefore I couldn't share, or I can give but not if I feel legally [bound to do so]. Already I feel legally bound, imagine being two in that, I would go crazy. I would never do it. I would never do it. And I would ever have done it. [...]

FJ: Do you think the same thing?

R: Exactly that way. I think that it's something, yes, important, I am happy for the countries, there you go. But it's something that I am not – that we are not interested in. [...]

FJ: You say you aren't interested in the sense, as he said, on the emotional level, or also on the pragmatic level, of responsibilities, rights et cetera, for you? You said you are not interested in that type of recognition in the end?

R: It doesn't interest me in the sense that I don't need it. Personally I don't need it. It's something in which I don't ...

P: You got two here ...

R: Eh.

M: ... who want to nevertheless go their own ways with their own independence.

R: Exactly.

FJ: Yes. Mm.

M: That's why for myself I don't need to bind myself socially with someone. [...]

R: For me, I said it before: marriage is something I have never thought about. It doesn't interest me. [...]

M: Actually, I'd rather not be registered at all myself.

FJ: [laughs]

R: That's funny I was just thinking the same thing.

M: If I could be anonymous...

R: If you could erase, - I don't know where my name is written down, but I would like to erase it.⁹¹

⁸⁹ As one respondent in Rome, Michele, answers the explicitly asked question about the difference between a form of registered partnership and civil marriage: "It has never crossed my mind" ("Non ci ho mai pensato.")

⁹⁰ Michele and Raffaele, as Luisa and Marianna, were interviewed as a couple. Couple discourses raise various specific methodological questions and cannot be taken on a par with individual interviews, nor with other group interviews. Here, Michele seems particularly dominant in defining the relationship. Besides his greater maturity (he is 23 years older), he is also a relatively prominent TV personality – a fact that I was told retrospectively by Michele himself, after contacting the couple at the "Gay Village" in Rome – which was an element of a certain imbalance between the partners as far as their discourses were concerned. On the question of a age and power imbalances in gay relationships, see e.g. Judith Stacey's colourful analysis in the case of "mother Randolph and his Foundling Boys": "Mother Randolph' presides with love, wit, wisdom and, it must be acknowledged, financial control, as well as responsibility [...]." Judith Stacey (2004), "Cruising to Familyland", p. 189.

⁹¹ Original: "FJ: A voi interesserebbe utilizzare una forma di Pacs o il matrimonio? Che vantaggi o svantaggi vedete registrando un rapporto di coppia in questo modo? - M: Per me solo svantaggi. - R: Perché? - M: Personalmente. Ma perché non mi sentirei più libero. - R: Con un matrimonio? M: Sì. Assolutamente. - Proprio più libero anche legalmente. Anche nelle cose. Io sono uno che - non è attaccato a niente. - Per cui, non potrei - dividere o - posso dare, molto, ma non se legalmente me sento, già legalmente io - mi sento già legato, pensa in due, divento scemo. Non lo farei mai. Non lo farei mai. E mai l'avrei fatto. [...] - FJ: Mm. - Pensi anche tu questo?"

For Michele, marriage contradicts a central value for him: his liberty or independence. ("I would no longer feel free", "not attached to anything". "my own independence"). Registering a partnership is therefore a possibility he very drastically excludes: "never [...] never [...] never". His younger partner, Raffaele, as the interview goes, seems to follow Michele's opinion, as initially he questions Michele's categorical "no" answer: "Why? With marriage?" ("Perché? Con un matrimonio?") Thereafter, he however supports the same argument in his own statements, but without referring to freedom and independence, but to disinterest instead: "something that I am not – that we are not interested in", "I don't need it" "never thought about, it doesn't interest me". Together with marriage it is therefore, at least for Michele, the idea of commitment that is undesirable, if commitment is meant to restrict freedom or "going one's own way". This view is, in the end of this passage, accompanied by the rejection of state involvement, in what could be described as an anarchist-individualist position: "I don't know where my name is written down, but I would like to erase it."

We saw a similar view in Christophe's case (chapter 3). Christophe says that both when he had been in a long-term relationship and now, in thinking of future relationships, the idea of marrying or signing a *Pacs* never crossed his mind, and his dislike of signing a *Pacs* or marrying goes at least as far as renouncing the financial benefits it might involve.

Christophe (Paris, 39)

I don't want to sign anything before a court or a town hall or anywhere, I'm not interested in it. I mean, it's good that it exists, but as for marriage, I'm not interested.⁹² [compare chapter 3]

Michele seemed wary of commitment to the extent that individual freedom would be restricted. Christophe here instead immediately stresses that "it's good that it exists" (and so does Michele at a later point in the interview). Indeed most of those who at one point in the interview dismiss signing a legal partnership as an option for themselves are not opposed to the idea of commitment as such. Instead, they stress that a non-legal commitment would be

- R: Essattamente così. Penso che sia una cosa, sì, importante, sono contento per i paesi, va. Però è una cosa che a me non, non, - ci interessa. [...] - FJ: Eh, dici che non ti interessa nel senso, come a detto lui, sul, sul livello emotivo, o anche sul livello pragmatico, - della responsabilità, del, - dei diritti et cetera, per te? Hai detto non, non ti interessa alla fine, un riconoscimento di quel tipo? - R: Non mi interessa nel senso che non, non, ehm, - non mi serve. A me personalmente non serve. - E una cosa in cui non ... - M: Hai beccato due, - - R: Eh. - M: ... che vogliono camminare comunque con una propria indipendenza. - R: Esatto. - FJ: Sì. Mm. - M: Per cui, a me non serve legarmi - socialmente con una persona. [...] - R: Per me, l'ho detto prima, il matrimonio è una cosa in cui io non ho mai pensato. Non mi interessa. [...] - M: Io vorrei non essere registrato io figurati... - FJ: [rido] - R: Pensa un po', anch'io stavo pensando la stessa. - M: [ride] Se potessi essere anonimo. - R: Se potresti cancell-, - sì. Non so dove sia scritto il mio nome, ma vorrei cancellarlo. [ride] Anche da solo."

more important to them. Gemma for instance, whose narrative we have also considered in more detail above (see longer interview extract, chapter 3), turned the argument around and sees commitment as the real difficulty and yet valuable aspect of partnership:

Gemma (London, 36)

G: When people say why can't we get married, but to me it's like: why would you want to? - Can you not commit to each other?

FJ: Yes.

G: [laughing:] But maybe that's to ask them too much.

Gemma in fact seemed to point to the idea that marriage and commitment as being some kind of *alternatives*. Of course, what is meant is not that one should choose one or the other. Rather, a critical stance towards marriage is implied in such her statement, and the idea that commitment could stem from it.

Simone also values commitment. But, adding to her critique of marriage as an institution (see 4.1), for her, in line with Gemma's view, the paper signed for marriage or Eingetragene Partnerschaft is an "illusion" and any commitment should be an interpersonal one without state intervention of any kind. This latter one would restrict individual freedom in defining one's partnership ("Einschränkung der Freiheiten"):

Simone (Berlin, 43)

S: The bond or commitment does not increase [through marriage] in my opinion, but instead the restriction of the liberties of the individual [does].

FJ: Commitment, you said, is not being promoted. But would a bond be a positive thing then?

S: To have commitment in a relationship is a positive thing. But it is not based on such a certificate, but on agreements and mutual respect, towards the other one, and that's why I don't think that with that certificate there is any kind of change. In that sense. Even if some might imagine that there is. [laughs]⁹³

Simone's position combines the valuing of commitment with the defence of individual freedom – a freedom that would be restricted in marriage. Commitment for her is based on "respect" and can only incorrectly be "imagined" as a consequence of a formal commitment such as marriage. This negative connotation implied in a dismissive approach to marriage is then however mostly combined both with a political support for the claim to same-sex

⁹² Original: "J'ai pas envie de signer quoi que ce soit devant, devant une juridiction ou un maire ou quoi que ce soit, ça m'intéresse pas quoi. Je veux dire, c'est bien que ça existe, mais tout comme le mariage, ça m'intéresse pas."

⁹³ Original: "S: Die Verbundenheit oder die Verbindlichkeit nimmt [durch die Ehe] meiner Meinung nach nicht zu, sondern eher, ne Einschränkung der Freiheiten, - der einzelnen. - FJ: Äh, - Verbindlichkeit, sagtest du, wird nicht, wird dadurch nicht gefördert. - Verbindlichkeit wäre dann aber was Positives? - S: Verbindlichkeit in der Beziehung zu haben ist schon was Positives. Aber die gründet sich für mich eben nicht auf so nen Schein, sondern die gründet sich eher auf, Vereinbarungen oder Respekt voreinander und gegenüber der andern oder dem

marriage, as we have seen. The idea of “commitment” instead of marriage is one that has been rather intensively studied in relation to lesbian and gay couples.⁹⁴ This of course is partly due to the situation in which legal registration had not previously been possible.

It seems somehow contradictory that an overall consensual idealization of a committed relationship within this sample (to be sure: in some other interviews this is not the case) runs up against such a diversity and conflicting views on the idea of registering a partnership and what this would mean to them. Two values seem to be uncontroversial: free choice of a way of life and the ideal of shared love in a stable relationship. Differences then arise in various ways depending on how likely the ideal of shared love in a stable relationship can be and how its limits should be addressed (such as in duration or exclusivity) on the one hand, and on how various labels given to relationships are connoted, in particular to the married couple on the other.

The gap between the consensual values (committed couple and choice) and the discourses on marriage and other forms of registered partnership can be approached from two angles: either the consensual values are overall empty, and can be filled with very different meanings in real life, or on the contrary, the connotations are individually constructed independent of the social and legal institutions themselves. Marriage for example can be seen either as an institution of choice (you choose whether to marry or not, you choose whom to marry) or as an institution of non-choice (the state promotes marriage and society wants to oblige you to conform to a particular way of living your partnership and pushes you to have a certain type of partner). Pacs, Civil Partnership and Eingetragene Partnerschaft yet again can be seen alternatively as conforming to marriage (signing a document in legally framing the partnership) or in opposition to traditional family norms (being homosexual, or, particularly in the case of the Pacs: being more flexible and “modern”), as was also discussed in chapter 3.

4.3.5. Difficulties and obstacles

Yet again, in discussing the projection into hypothetical marriage plans, another element of the various discourses needs to be considered: how realistic the respondents judge such an idea to be. While many referred to abstract possibilities of marriage with ease and in detail, for some

ändern, und von daher glaub ich eben nicht, dass das mit diesem Schein irgendeine Änderung eigentlich gibt. So. Auch wenn sich das vielleicht viele einbilden. [lacht kurz]”

⁹⁴ See e.g. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), *Same-Sex Intimacies*.

respondents, the doubts over the likelihood of such an option were very much at the forefront. They referred either to the difficulty of finding an appropriate partner for such a commitment, or to the social environment, for example where parents were unaware of the respondents' homosexuality: Marriage was judged as being unrealistic on those grounds. Bianca, in the following passage, points to her parents as the first obstacle to the idea of marrying; after which she raises the difficulty of being with someone with whom there is a stable basis for "future projects", and finally she refers to the fact that such an option does not legally exist in Italy:

Bianca (Rome, 43)

FJ: Do you think you would want to use a possibility of recognition of a partnership, to register yourself in this way, or to marry if it existed?

B: Yes. Yes, but I don't know if I'd do it.

FJ: In what sense?

B: Eh, I don't know, as my parents don't know it I would not be able yet to make them accept that possibility. If I did it I'd do it secretly, right? Or, what do I know. Make my parents have a heart attack.

FJ: Why? Would that be the problem, that fact that, if you married, having to tell it to your...

B: Of course. You marry? Ok, no, not even, because in the end it's not said that you would necessarily have to say it. You would do it [with] those who know. In the meantime you are committed to the other person.

FJ: And for the rest, nevertheless, would it be an ideal, or something – what advantages or disadvantages do you see in this recognition of the couple?

B: It has to be a very committed partnership, above all a couple that however has common projects, for the future, so, if you want to create a nice relationship you still have to build something. I mean, it's not that I can do it with the first who happens to be around. Eh, perhaps after two or three months, you dump each other, right? There still has to be a solid base.

FJ: Mm. With your girlfriend of seventeen years [they were "together" for 17 years], did you talk about this kind of projects?

B: Yes. Yes. No, that was at the beginning of our story, as a matter of fact the first years are always the most beautiful ones. Then for the rest what do you do? We couldn't do it [...] because we would anyway have to go abroad.

FJ: Yes. Mm.

B: Then we talked about that thing. [...]

FJ: So what did you say?

B: Eh, to marry maybe, and – well good thing I didn't do it! [laughs]⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Original: "FJ: Pensi che vorresti utilizzare una possibilità di riconoscimento della coppia, di registrarsi in questo modo, o di sposarsi se esiste? - B: Sì. Sì, però non so se lo farei io. - FJ: In che senso? - B: Eh, non so, visto che non lo fanno i miei non so se riuscirei ancora, a farle accettare questa possibilità. Se lo facessi lo farei clandestinamente, no? Oppure, che ne so. Farei venire l'infarto ai miei. - FJ: Perché? Sarebbe questo il problema, sposandoti di dover dirlo ai ... - B: Certo. Che fai, ti sposi? Va be', non, neanche, perché poi alla fine non è detto che tu lo debba dire per forza. Lo fai tanto chi lo sa. Intanto sei tutelata con l'altra persona. - FJ: E per il resto, comunque per te sarebbe un, un ideale, o un, qualcosa, che vantaggi o svantaggi vedi in questo, in questo, questo riconoscimento del, della coppia? - B: Deve essere una coppia molto affiatata [affiatare, intenso], innanzitutto una coppia che comunque ha dei progetti, - futuri, quindi, se vuole instaurare un bel rapporto deve comunque costruire qualcosa. Cioè, non è che io lo posso fare con una, con la prima venuta. Eh, magari dopo due tre mesi, uno si accanna [si lascia], no? Deve comunque esserci una base solida. - FJ: Mm. Con la tua ragazza di diciassette anni, avete parlato di progetti di questo genere? - B: Sì. Sì. No, questo agli inizi della nostra storia, infatti i primi anni sono sempre i più belli. Poi, del resto che facevamo? Non potevamo farlo [...] perché saremmo dovuti [dovute] andare comunque all'estero. - FJ: Sì. Mm. - B: Poi se ne ha parlato di questa cosa. [...] - FJ: Cosa avete detto allora? - B: Eh, - magari di sposarci, e meno male che non l'ho fatto! [ride]"

The possibility of marrying, from Bianca's perspective, is in the first instance bracketed by the question of coming out to her parents; in the interview, this is the immediate thought Bianca pronounces. She is then left with the prospect of marrying "secretly" ("clandestinamente"), or, alternatively, making her parents have a "heart-attack". The social basis to marrying in a traditional way which would include the family is not given in her case. At the end of the passage, in which she discussed her 17-year-long relationship with a woman, which had by then ended, she sums up the question as to how much getting married had been a topic of discussion in saying: "good thing I didn't do it". In a way, this ironic comment points to the difficulty of being sure enough about her relationship in order for her to consider marriage, the risk being that it might fall apart: "perhaps after two or three months, you dump each other" ("magari dopo due tre mesi, uno si accanna").

Patti, who like Bianca is originally from Southern Italy, as a first reaction also points to difficulties involving her parents. Patti however quickly responds that these are problems that would be overcome if she was "really in love":

Patti (Rome, 38)

FJ: And for you, would it be a possible option?

P: In the future?

FJ: Mm.

P: I would have to get over so many things. The family, who anyhow doesn't know anything about me. But I think that yes, I would want it in the end. If I am really in love yes.⁹⁶

For Patti, hence, the overcoming of social difficulties is related to "real love". For others, the question of how reliable "love" is and to what extent a commitment can be counted on, is what makes them reluctant to believe in the idea of marriage, as we had seen in Bianca's case. Julien for example sees a strong conflict between what he would like the future to be and what is likely to be:

Julien (Paris, 29)

It could be seen as a utopia, as an unrealisable dream, because there are so many possibilities. Stability doesn't really interest people. Well, I don't know how it is outside of Paris ["in the Province"], but in Paris surely not. It is therefore quite unlikely that it could be fulfilled. In general, people either split up or have affairs each on their side.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Original: "FJ: E per te, sarebbe un'opzione possibile? - P: In futuro? - FJ: Mm. - P: Dovrei superare tante cose; la famiglia che non sa niente di me. Credo però sì, lo vorrei alla fine. Se sono veramente innamorato sì."

⁹⁷ Original: "Ça pourrait passer pour une utopie, pour un rêve irréalisable, parce qu'il y a tellement de possibilités. La stabilité intéresse moins les gens, bon, je ne sais pas pour la Province, mais à Paris sûrement pas. C'est donc peu probable que ça se réalise. En général, soit les gens se séparent, soit ils fréquentent chacun de leur côté."

The kind of love he has experienced with his ex-boyfriend retrospectively becomes a utopian vision of partnership. He wants a committed relationship, but sees it as a "unrealisable dream" ("rêve irréalisable"), "surely not" ("sûrement pas"), and "quite unlikely" ("peu probable"). His personal desire is seen as clashing with observed norms of what lifestyles Parisian gays have, according to Julien.

Particularly for many younger respondents within the sample, the commitment to a stable relationship is a wish, desire or aim, even if some consider it for the future rather than for the present. The findings here reflect research undertaken on gay men by Bochow et. al that point to a strong rise in the proportion of those who "declare that they are looking for a stable relationship, because they were 18% in 1985 and 59% in 1997, which undoubtedly corresponds to an evolution in the social acceptance of homosexuality, materialized for example in the possibility for homosexuals to envisage of a Pacs."⁹⁸ Thus, similar to the findings here, concerning the value of stable partnership, there is much clearer evidence in the *declared aims* of the respondents as compared to the factual relationship practice found in the samples, which instead has remained remarkably stable, at least since the end of the 1980s.⁹⁹ We shall return to these observations in section 4.4. on partnership.

However, it is precisely because of this desire that difficulties in attaining it are spelled out at some length in a number of discourses. The negation of this partnership perspective in these discourses is linked to uncontrollable obstacles: the ephemeral character of homosexual relationships, finding a partner, finding someone who shares the same ideas etc. The difficulty of finding the right person for the "ideal" of marriage is also what Katharina and Jenny discuss in the following passage:

Jenny (Berlin, 20), Katharina (Berlin, 22)

J: Yes, as I said, if the right person came along one day, and I was convinced that I loved her and wanted to spend my life with her, then I would marry her, clearly. Why not?

⁹⁸ Michael Bochow, Marie Jauffret-Roustide, Alice Michel and Marie-Ange Schiltz. "Les évolutions des comportements sexuels et les modes de vie à travers les enquêtes réalisées dans la presse gay en France (1985-2000)." Broqua, Lert and Souteyrand, eds. (2003), *Homosexualités au temps du sida*, p. 40. (Original: "déclarent rechercher une relation stable, puisqu'ils étaient 18% en 1985 et sont 59% en 1997, ce qui correspond sans doute à une évolution de l'acceptation sociale de l'homosexualité, concrétisée par exemple par la possibilité pour les homosexuels de recourir au PaCS. ") See also Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*, p. 202, concerning Italy.

⁹⁹ Ibid. The results here show that between 1985 and 2000, the proportion of gay men in stable relationships oscillates between 49 and 58% without indicating a clear trend. Within relationships, the proportion of exclusive (as opposed to open) relationships increases in 1987 (from 17 to 26% of the whole sample) to fall again in 1997 and 2000 (22 and 19%).

K: Well, that would also be my ideal, but, well, I doubt very much whether something like that is really possible, well, I think, to be together for your whole life. Well, I mean I would really wish that, but I consider it rather less likely in that way.

J: But you can't say that at all yet. I mean I wouldn't marry straight away either. Perhaps really [later] when I know, ok, we've been together for years, and I can't imagine anything else. And then you also have a feeling of belonging together, and I mean, yes, as I said, with marriage many things get easier financially as well. Also financially everything is easier and so on. Well I don't find that bad after all.¹⁰⁰

Jenny sees a strongly committed relationship as a prerequisite for marriage. Katharina however has doubts that a committed lifelong relationship is possible at all. Under such conditions, Katharina argues that it as "desirable" ("Ideal", "würds mir wünschen"), but questions the possibility of such a partnership existing: "doubt very much" ("zweifel sehr stark daran"), "consider it rather less likely" ("halte das für weniger möglich"). What their discussion highlights is once again the gap between what is projected as "desirable" on the one hand, and what is considered to be "likely" or "possible" on the other. But it also raises the question of how an institution such as marriage is defined at all. What does it mean for a couple to marry or sign a civil partnership? Is it a lifelong commitment, as Jenny sees it? And how is the idea of the couple linked for example to questions of sexuality? In the following, the different interpretations of what marriage or registered partnership can represent for the respondents are briefly looked at. The main aim here, rather than a systematic representation of the various definitions which respondents give to marriage, is to highlight the importance of the question itself: the idea of marriage can indeed be associated with very different concepts of partnership, which in turn will have strong implications for how respondents project themselves into such an institution (or not).

4.3.6. What does marriage mean?

Respondents were asked if marriage meant being "together for life", as Jenny and Katharina for example described as an ideal. Most often, a nuanced answer was given that differentiated between what marriage meant to them, in contrast to a "traditional" idea of marriage, linked to an "eternal" commitment.

¹⁰⁰ Original: "J: Ja, wie gesagt, wenn sich irgendwann die richtige Person finden sollte, und ich bin davon überzeugt ich liebe sie und möchte mit ihr mein – Leben verbringen, dann würd ich sie heiraten, klar. Warum nicht. K: Nun, das wäre auch mein Ideal, aber – na ja, ich zweifel sehr stark daran, ob ob so was wirklich möglich ist, also, ich denke, na ja, füs ganz Leben zusammen zu sein. Mmm, ja, ich meine ich würds mir wünschen, aber ich halte das eher für – weniger möglich so.

J: Kannst du doch jetzt gar nicht sagen. Ich mein ich würd ja nicht sofort heiraten. Vielleicht wirklich nach, wenn ich dann weiß, so jetzt sind wir Jahre zusammen und ich kann mir nichts anderes vorstellen. Und, man hat ja dann auch so ein Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl, und äh, ich mein ja, wie gesagt durch die Ehe macht sich ja auch finanziell vieles leicht. Ist ja auch finanziell alles leichter und so. Also find ich schon nicht schlecht."

Elena (Rome, 31)

FJ: Do you think that marriage means being together for life?

E: Eh, not necessarily. Probably marriage represents a bit the desire to invest in a relationship. But it's not necessarily the case that it's forever. It could also be it, but it isn't said that it's an eternal thing. I don't have that conviction. [laughs] [...] Well, I'm not that much - I never liked marriage, the traditional ceremony.¹⁰¹

For Elena therefore, the idea of "investment" is connected to marriage: "represents a bit the desire to invest" ("rappresenta un po' la voglia di investire"). While she says that it "could also be" meant forever, she doubts it: "I don't have that conviction." ("questa convinzione non ce l'ho"). In one way or another, the idea of commitment is implied both in marriage and Civil Partnership, and is stressed when respondents are asked to define them. Jacques for example sees the idea of a stable relationship as a possibility, but in rather abstract terms: "I don't ask myself this kind of question all that much" ("Je me pose pas trop ce genre de questions.") He sees a Pacs as an important commitment towards another person but also towards society:

Jacques (Paris, 55)

It is nevertheless a commitment [...] between two people, and then it is also a commitment before society. [...] It's not to be taken lightly.¹⁰²

Unlike Elena, Jacques defends an overall conservative view of marriage and the family. He sees the merits of traditional (heterosexual) family ("the merits of traditional family"/"les mérites de la famille traditionnelle") but recognizes the realities of same-sex couples in a pragmatic way ("also recognizes reality"/"reconnaît aussi la réalité"). While for him, marriage has a traditional connotation (and should only be there for couples of the opposite sex) he identifies the Pacs with a strong commitment that implies a duty to comply with an engagement before society.

If commitment and duration are seen as fundamental in saying what marriage is about, a second question concerns what the relationship is based on – a love relationship, a sexual relationship, a pragmatic relationship, a "solidarity" relationship?

In France the proposal to regard the Pacs as an institution not necessarily limited to sexual relationships was discussed at the political level,¹⁰³ however largely in order to play down the

¹⁰¹ Original: "FJ: Pensi che il matrimonio significhi stare insieme per la vita? - F: Eh, - non necessariamente. - Probabilmente il matrimonio rappresenta un po' la voglia di investire - su una relazione. Però non, non è detto che sia eterna. Potrebbe anche esserlo, ma non è detto che, che sia una cosa eterna. Questa convinzione non ce l'ho. [ride] [...] Eh, io non sono tanto, non, non mi è mai piaciuto il - il matrimonio, la cerimonia tradizionale."

¹⁰² Original: "C'est quand même un engagement [...] entre deux personnes, et puis aussi c'est un engagement devant la société. [...] C'est pas à la légère."

fact that homosexual couples would be recognized. But, according to Gérard Ignasse, quite a few have subsequently used the Pacs in this way. While less numerous than the “romantic” couples in the sample of pacsed couples in his study, Ignasse pointed at this category as “solidarity couples”, where sexuality is not part of the partnership:

... same-sex couples who have a “very strong affective relationship but sex elsewhere” (H., 41, sol., 25). Some are “homosexual” couples that “tend towards solidarity”. In this case, which concerns friendships, sometimes after period of sexual relationship, the Pacs offers an interesting framework.¹⁰⁴

In this sense, the Pacs, but also marriage, can be reappropriated on the basis of a non-sexual homosexual partnership. Such a reappropriation can however take various forms. Sometimes, it can go as far as detaching completely the institutionalized partnership from the idea of the couple itself. Hans (Berlin, 47) for example considers the idea of marrying¹⁰⁵ his “ex-boyfriend”, while in the meantime pursuing a new relationship with a boyfriend:

Hans (Berlin, 47)

We still think about whether we shouldn't marry anyhow, even if we're not together anymore.

Hans defines his relationship as being over (“we're not together anymore”). Hence, it is not the idea of “couple” that he has in mind, but the possibility of two people marrying who care strongly about each other. On a theoretical level, the idea of linking non-sexual and homosexual couples is striking in that also the question of sexual orientation ultimately becomes obsolete if the choice of a partner does not coincide with sexual activity: is a non-sexual partnership between two women or two men to be considered a “homosexual partnership” at all? The categories are then ultimately blurred.¹⁰⁶

The thought of non-sexual partnerships is seen by some as an anti-conformist choice that transcends the conventional understanding of the couple. Others instead see the lack of

¹⁰³ E. Fassin and M. Feher. “Parité et PaCS: anatomie politique d'un rapport” Borillo, Fassin and Iacub (1999), *Au-delà du Pacs* : 13-44, see p. 23.

¹⁰⁴ G. Ignasse, ed. (2002), *Les pacsé-e-s*, p. 17. (Original: “... des couples de même sexe ayant un « lien affectif fort mais sexe extérieur » (H., 41 ans, sol., 25). Certains sont des couples « homosexuels tendant vers la solidarité ». Dans ce cas qui concerne des relations d'amitié, parfois après une période de vie sexuelle commune, le pacs offre un cadre intéressant.”)

¹⁰⁵ Signing an *Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft* (often called *Homo-Ehe*) is mostly referred to as “marrying”.

¹⁰⁶ On this point see e.g. Eric Fassin's discussion of the possibility of “inventiveness” in homosexual partnerships, where he refers to Michel Feher: “[H]omosexual couples who not only can find it legitimate to 'have sex with others', but even not to have sex with one another at all anymore, would allow to see a kind of marriage that, as Michel Feher suggests, would not, or not anymore, be based on the sexual relationship.” (Original: “les couples homosexuels, qui peuvent trouver légitime, non seulement de 'coucher ailleurs', mais de ne plus coucher ensemble, permettraient même d'entrevoir un mariage qui, comme le suggère Michel Feher [2004], ne serait pas (ou plus) fondé sur la relation sexuelle [...]”). In: Eric Fassin. “Lieux d'invention, l'amitié, le mariage et la famille.” *Vacarme*, Vol 29, 2004. online version www.vacarme.eu.org/article457.html

sexuality in long-term committed couples as commonplace in both hetero- and homosexual "conventional" relationships and marriages. Lasse for example, who had been living in a registered partnership in Denmark before moving to London, provides an account that presents the lack of sexuality in his "marriage" as having been frustrating:

Lasse (London, 37)

L: This here I know it sounds strange, but when I; the last seven years of our partnership, we had, we didn't have sex. It was only friendship.

FJ: Ah ok.

L: Mm.

FJ: So basically, when you, already when you got married you didn't have any sex, -

L: No.

FJ: sexual relationship?

L: No. - Also because, I, err, -. One year after, it was difficult, after the accident it was difficult for me to have sex. But, eh, it totally, eh, yeah, - died. - The feelings there. But we, we still like each other, as person, and respect each other. - I think it, it's not unusual to, to tell this.

FJ: Yes.

L: ... because I think a lot of straight people as ...

FJ: Yes.

L: ... homosexual couples have the same. - But then I was desperate, because, if I had been in the sixties, it would have been ok. But now, - I'm thirty-seven. So you can see, it was a little bit, - it was too early to stop having sex, wasn't it? [laughs]

FJ: And your partner was the same age?

L: No he was ten years older.

[...]

L: I wasn't married to a guy. I was married to a television.

FJ: [laugh]

L: So over here, I don't look at television at all [laughingly]. -It was his, - way to hide himself.

FJ: Yes.

L: Because then he didn't have to, confront himself with the problems he has inside. But of course my right hands were nearly falling off in the end [laughs] - Because I didn't have, this here can sound even more crazy, I didn't have any partners.

FJ: Yes.

L: I didn't get out and find anyone else, because the way we, we built out our life was so tight.

While in Lasse' case, the initial absence of sex after entering a registered partnership was linked to a medical difficulty, he ultimately sees the resulting disjuncture both as a widespread phenomenon and as a frustrating one. He characterizes his (married) relationship as a "friendship", but describes it as an unhappy situation: "I was desperate." The picture of such an "arrangement" is very different from that of the "solidarity couple" that Ignasse (and Hans) had in mind. Lasse is describing a frustrating marital situation rather than a creative re-appropriation of the institutional framework. He indeed compares it to what he sees as a relatively common phenomenon in heterosexual marriages: "I think a lot of straight people [...] have the same." However, the absence of sex within his marriage ultimately goes against what he understands the definition of marriage to be about: "I was not married to a guy. I was

married to a television.” This implies that without being a sexual relationship, for Lasse, marriage loses its meaning.

In this section, a certain paradox has been noted between the overall support for the creation of same-sex partnership institutions on the one hand, and the personal use that respondents may or may not want to make of it on the other. In their support for the reforms and the descriptions of social change, discourses were surprisingly similar. We have noted a general trend of an “opening” society that is moving towards greater acceptance. When asked whether they would aim at marriage or Civil Partnership themselves, as we have seen, opinions instead differed widely. In turn, we have seen that these various critical views concerning the institutionalization of a love relationship only rarely translated into a (political) opposition to the legal recognition of same-sex couples. Beyond the question of whether they consider such an option for themselves, the associations that were made with marriage and different forms of registered partnership differed: some respondents focused on specific benefits and others on the symbolic form of recognition, mostly interlinking both aspects but with different priorities about them. Yet again, as we have seen in the last examples of Hans and Lasse, definitions of marriage can differ widely as to what the partnership represents at all, including the possibility of dissociating marriage and the couple altogether. The following section follows up on this question by more generally addressing partnership and sexuality independent of marriage and legal institutions.

4.4. Partnership, love, sexuality

What kind of relationship is desirable?

	Monogamous relationship	Monogamous ideal but not sure	Negotiated / Depends on partner	Open relationship	Being "unfaithful" can happen but would not say	None "right now"
B	Jenny Daniel (Andreas)	Nadine Petra	Monika Thorsten	Hans Sven	Simone Katharina	Andreas
L	Julia Miguel Harriet Gemma Matthew*	Anne Mark Lasse	Owen Jason	Kevin		Gareth
R	Dario Antonella Bianca Luisa Angelo Carlo	Claudia Marianna Elena		Mario Michele Raffaele	Patti Gabriella	
P	Fabienne Christophe Léa	Jérémy Julien (Dorotheé)	Antoine Jacques (Olivier)			Nicole Dorotheé Olivier

(*: monogamous but threesomes possible)

In this fourth section, the question of sexuality and partnership will be reviewed. As discussed above, the discourses on how to define marriage had already implied that very different models of partnership can be understood as long-term aims or likely solutions that would suffice to the values of freedom, choice and commitment that we have seen repeatedly formulated in the past three sections. The type of commitment and the duration of a relationship are two main aspects that define partnership. Sexuality or sexual activity can of course take various other forms than the couple, such as in occasional sexual encounters. First, the question as to whether partnership is on the whole aspired to or not will thus be addressed. Secondly, the definitions of partnership that can take very different forms will be considered. And finally, as related to the definition of partnership, sexual exclusiveness or openness within same-sex relationships will be analyzed through the respondents' discourses, drawing on debates on monogamy and sexual promiscuity.

4.4.1. Couple or single

First, in talking about options of partnership registration, which is the starting point of this study, it is often assumed at the outset that most or all men and women fundamentally want to be in a couple. The way the interview was structured took account of such an assumption on which the research topic might rest; it purposefully left room for a denial of partnership perspectives and explicitly questioned the importance of other people in the respondents' social environment without imposing the view that the (potential) partner should have a central role in their lives. All in all, however, most respondents saw partnership and the couple as central to their lives and to their love life and sexual life. However, sometimes, the idea of the couple in its conventional form was rejected outright. Gareth for example does not consider partnership to be an aim at all:

Gareth (London, 45)

G: I'm not, I haven't got a partner, or anything. And – it never really bothered me, but, so, -.

FJ: Yes.

G: Never, there was no, ah don't you want to meet someone? Not really. I don't know. [...] I don't know. But I've never really – probably, sometimes I think, oh yeah would be nice, and then I think, oh no it wouldn't, 'cause, I don't think I see that many – happy relationships about.

FJ: Yes.

G: My friend Mike, should I talk about him? Right? He's been with this guy for two years. And there's no way they're happy.

In Gareth' case, the weighing of a potential partnership prospect is made explicit in evaluating the relationships he sees around him. His friend Mike serves as a negative example. The assertion that "it never really bothered" him is accompanied by a seemingly occasional doubt:

"sometimes I think yeah it would be nice". His judgment, ultimately, is then based on observing those who have a relationship: "there is no way they're happy."

Similarly, Nicole does not portray a relationship as what she is looking for, despite having had a continuous (but loose) relationship with Fabienne, who was also interviewed, for several years:

Nicole (Paris, 54)

N: I'm in a relationship that doesn't work very well. But it's a person I have known for four or five years after all. And at the beginning of the relationship, [...] she was living in Switzerland. Now she lives in France. So, well, in a sense it's more convenient. At the same time, it hasn't necessarily greatly promoted our relationship. But I think that it's a relationship that is perhaps evolving at the moment. The problem is that I have a little adopted daughter. So I have a rather complicated life after all, because I live both like a single in my head, who does not want to be bothered, nor a couple and all that, and, at the same time, I have many obligations as a mother. So let's say that everything is a bit acrobatic.

FJ: Mm. And how often do you see each other with your friend ["amie"], more or less?

N: Lets say that we see each other a quarter of the time. I mean, when I have holidays I try to take them with her alone. It's not the same when my daughter is there. And during the week there are days when it's better that I am alone with the girl. [...] I don't think that we could be together all the time, you know.¹⁰⁷

Rather than seeing a relationship as an aim, she describes herself as a single "in her head". A relationship appears as an unnecessary complication of her life, in which she finds it difficult to allocate time to people close to her besides her 14-year-old adopted daughter. The crude denial of a partnership perspective ("not [...] bothered", "pas envie d'emmerdement") contrasts with her description of her present situation as a "relationship". This relationship is seen on the one hand as "not necessarily working well", and on the other hand as "evolving". The gap between the existing relationship and a relationship that would "work well" seems to lie in the amount of time the two partners would spend together – a matter of difficulty for Nicole both on practical grounds and, as it seems, also in terms of desirability: "I don't think that we could be together all the time". In a way, it looks as if Nicole was in a relationship despite favouring an independent single life, in which time management and a focus on other priorities (daughter, work) would be easier.

¹⁰⁷ Original: "N: [Je suis] dans une relation qui ne marche pas forcément très bien, mais, c'est une personne que je connais depuis quand même quatre ou cinq ans maintenant. – Et au début de la relation, [...] elle vivait en Suisse, et maintenant elle vit en France. Donc, bon, c'est plus commode dans un sens. De l'autre côté, ça n'a pas forcément favorisé la relation outre mesure. Mais je pense, c'est une relation qui est en train d'évoluer peut-être. Le problème étant que j'ai moi, une petite fille qui est adoptée et que donc, j'ai une vie quand même assez compliquée, parce que je vis à la fois dans la tête comme une célibataire, qui a pas envie d'emmerdement, ni de couple et tout ça. En même temps j'ai beaucoup d'astreintes de mère de famille quoi. Donc tout est un peu acrobatique disons. – FJ: Mm. – Et vous vous voyez combien de temps à peu près donc avec votre amie ? – N: Disons qu'on se voit le quart du temps. – Je veux dire que, – quand j'ai des vacances, j'essaie d'en prendre avec

Projections into the future of partnership situations are guided both by the personal norms and desires and by the expected likelihood that a desired outcome will materialize. Various aspects of these projections concern the wish to have a stable partner (or not), the form this partnership takes (e.g. cohabiting or not), the level of commitment that should or could be formally taken (such as by signing a *Pacs* or *Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft* or the desire to marry), the wish or not to have children with the partner or otherwise, the role of other important persons such as friends, and the broader vision of one's future social environment in old age.

By far most of the respondents see a relationship as central to their life, and see their partner as one of the most important people for them. Harriet for example sees "my family and my partner" as a "standard answer" to the question on who "the most important people in her life" are:

Harriet (London, 35)

FJ: Who for you in general are the most important people in your life? –

H: I guess it's a standard answer. – It's, it's my family and my partner. And obviously I care deeply about my friends. – But you know, friends come and go. [...]

FJ: And what about the future? [...] In ten years time [...] how do you see yourself?

H: I do see myself as very happy and content in ten years time. I do actually find year on year I'm even more content and happier and comfortable and sorted than the previous year. And I start, I notice, I give less of a stuff about other things and other people and I just tend to enjoy myself a lot more. So, in the future I'm sure that, well I will have a partner. And I'm sure that I'll be living with someone, - and I'm sure there's a fifty-fifty chance that I would have children. And I expect to be happy and healthy and with somebody. Yeah.Yeah, be optimist, for ten years time. [...] Hopefully a little bit more in the bank.

Harriet has been in a relationship with Julia for about six months at the time of interview. Previously, she had been with another woman for ten years. In this passage, the role of the partner is very central, and she names her just after her family (parents and sibling, as specified elsewhere) when asked about who is important in her life. The fact that she believes this to be a "standard answer" implies that she views it as a dominant norm. Interestingly, "friends", who follow in her account, are seen as people who "come and go", thereby suggesting the more durable and stable character of a partnership as compared to friendships – which was not universally seen in this way.¹⁰⁸ In projecting herself into the future, a close and

elle seule. – C'est pas pareil si ma fille est là. – Et puis dans la semaine, il y a des jours où c'est mieux que je sois seule avec la petite. [...] Je pense pas qu'on pourrait être tout le temps ensemble quoi."

¹⁰⁸ Compare Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), *Same-Sex Intimacies*, chapter 3: "The friendship ethic": pp. 51-76. Altman (1982:190) is quoted with the view that friendships are more central to couple-relationships in gay lives: "what many gay lives miss in terms of friendship is more than compensated in friendship networks, which often become de facto families" (p. 52). Interviewee Paul (22 y-o) is quoted: "They're [friends, my addition] essential. ... Obviously, it's a bit different with a boyfriend because two months in it's wonderful but [after that]

stable relationship is clearly valued, where her description of a cohabiting partnership ("living with someone", "I'm sure that I will have a partner", "expect to be [...] happy with somebody") is associated with several positive attributes: "happy", "content", "comfortable", "enjoy", "optimist".

While a stable relationship is most often aspired to, the reality of such a wish is not always without difficulty, and often other priorities or desires are in conflict with stability and commitment. Sometimes it is finding the right person that poses problems. In Patti's case, an intense relationship with a women with whom "to share everything" is seen as an explicit aim, but stands in conflict with her freedom:

Patti (Rome, 38)

I would want something stable and a person with whom to share everything. Happiness, pain, pleasures, emotions, I mean, it's what I would like to have, right? But it's not easy. However, that [girl] I met now, even if, anyway I realize that she is much more into it than I am. Me, yes, I am attracted because when I met her I liked her. So, I met her at the Coming [Coming Out bar] two weeks ago. I mean, ok, we exchanged looks a bit; then she started to flirt with me. And anyway I like it when a person – apart from the fact that how she thinks. I mean, she is a simple person, I mean, proper. I mean, it's not a person who [has had so many stories]. She had one relationship only with a woman. Six years. So, I mean, now we are together. [...] Then, I do have some lovers, what I want to say is, because I am a free kind of person. I have never had long stories, perhaps because I have always been afraid of commitment. And I always tend to, when relationships become too strong, I tend a bit to get out of them. Maybe a fear that someone could suffocate me, could restrict my freedoms. Even if it is wrong, by all means. But unfortunately, I have always lived in that way And then I have always been free. Because I used to be married. My marriage went wrong. Since then, I have not had any ties. So I always have these kind of meaningless stories.¹⁰⁹

who knows?" (p. 61) While many respondents referred to friends as being crucial, and some rejected the importance of (potential) partners, the "friendship ethic" did not (perhaps surprisingly not) appear that clearly in the fieldwork here. This may in part be linked to the design of the interview questionnaire as looking at plans and projects more than at existing social networks, and of course to the focus on the question of the couple, despite the attempt to avoid the exclusion of discourses that would not centre on the couple. The field and access strategies are another potential factor for this difference (compare chapter 2).

¹⁰⁹ Original: "Io vorrei qualcosa di stabile e una persona con cui condividere tutto. Le gioie, dolori, - piaceri, emozioni, - cioè, è quello che mi piacerebbe avere, no? Però, non è facile. Comunque, questa, che ho incontrato adesso anche se, comunque mi rendo conto che lei è molto più coinvolta di me. Io sì, sono attratto, perché quando l'ho conosciuta mi è piaciuta. Quindi, al Coming [bar] l'ho conosciuta, - due settimane fa. Cioè, va be', ci siamo un po' scambiato gli sguardi, poi lei mi ha iniziato a corteggiare. E, comunque, mi piace quando una persona, a parte, mi piace come è, - di testa. Cioè, una persona semplice, cioè, pulita. Cioè, non è una persona che [ha avuto tante storie]. Lei ha avuto una relazione solo con una donna. Sei anni. Quindi. Cioè, adesso siamo insieme. [...] Poi io qualche amichetta la faccio, voglio dire, perché sono un po' libera come persona, - . Io non ho mai avuto lunghe storie, - forse perché ho sempre avuto paura del legame. Eh, tendo sempre, quando i rapporti diventano troppo forti, tendo un po' a uscirne. Forse una paura di, - che qualcuno mi possa soffocare, possa limitare le mie libertà. Anche s'è sbagliato, per carità. Però purtroppo, io ho sempre vissuto così. Poi sono sempre stata libera. Perché io sono stata sposata. Mi è andato male il matrimonio. Da allora io non ho più avuto legami. Quindi ho avuto sempre storie così, senza importanza."

At the beginning of this passage, in a very romantic tone, Patti embraces the idea of a committed relationship, characterized by stability (“something stable”/“qualcosa di stabile”) and sharing “pleasures”, “pains” and “emotions”. But she stresses: “non è facile”. Indeed, in describing her recent partnership of two weeks, she sees herself as torn between the desire for such a relationship on the one hand, and her own tendency to insist on her freedom: “when relationships become too strong, I tend [...] to get out of them”. Her value judgment favours stability and commitment, as she condemns her tendency to avoid commitment (“it’s wrong”/“è sbagliato”, “unfortunately”/“purtroppo”), but she explains that she has “always been free” ever since her marriage “went wrong”. Thereby, despite her desire for partnership, she describes herself as “always” having lived “stories like that, without importance”. Such a clash of the ideal of partnership with other aspects of what is important in the respondents’ life such as independence explains how the predominantly shared value of partnership and commitment encounters a vast variety of concrete partnership situations, occasional or shorter intimate relationships and different specific understandings of partnership altogether.

Often, different projections are seen as attached to different life cycles, such as “being young” (adventures etc.), “later” (more serious), and “when I am old” (less concerned about sexuality). In this context we can look at three younger respondents whom we have already mentioned: Dorothee, Daniel and Katharina. Dorothee (see chapter 3) thinks that being single has great advantages, but that the search for a serious relationship becomes inevitable with the time:

Dorothee (Paris, 26)

As I am now, that means with no one, [...] I do what I want. Actually, I feel really well like this. [...] It’s cool, you know. I have no ties. But it’s true that it’s not possible in the long-run. What we are all looking for, I think, is [to be with] some one after all.¹¹⁰

As we have seen, in her narrative it is not fully clear whether the desire to seek a stable partner is one that is expected to arise at a later stage or one that is there all the time but can wait. But it is established as a general aim: “what we are all looking for” (“ce qu’on cherche tous”). While her present life is focusing on freedom (“no ties”, “pas d’attaches”), she sees this preference as restricted to a limited amount of time: “not possible in the long-run” (“à la longue c’est impossible”). (compare chapter 3)

¹¹⁰ Original: “Comme je suis maintenant, c’est-à-dire avec personne, [...] je fais ce que je veux. En fait je suis vraiment bien comme ça, [...] C’est cool quoi. J’ai pas d’attaches. Mais c’est vrai qu’à la longue c’est impossible. Ce qu’on recherche tous je pense, c’est quand même quelqu’un.”

Daniel (chapter 2 and 4.3), as we saw earlier, sees an Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft as a long-term aim. He shares Dorothée's view that in the long run, one realizes the importance of commitment and partnership security, a view that he holds already, in contrast to many who "are living their youth" in multiple relationships:

Daniel (Berlin 25)

I won't be single forever, I guarantee you I won't, I'm not the type of person for that. [...] Many, yes, when you are still young, well, many are still in several relationships and there it can change every three weeks, so many don't think of it because of that I think. They are living their youth and they might wise up at some time later.¹¹¹

In this, he sees himself as an exception amongst younger gays: "when you are still young [...] it can change every three weeks". The absence of commitment he observes in others is something he links to their youth, and the idea of long-term partnership as being related to reasonableness.

Katharina characterized herself as "single and on the look-out" ("Single und auf der Jagd") when asked to describe herself in the personal details asked for after the interview. Quite similarly, however, when asked about how she sees her future in ten years' time, she sees herself as "settled down" in a relationship. She reasserts that for her, it is more the relationship that matters than the question as to whether it is female or male partner:

Katharina (Berlin, 22)

Well, I do think that I am a relationship type of person, and well I would also wish that for myself [and] [...] settle down.¹¹²

Katharina describes her desire for a relationship by defining herself as a "relationship-type", a person with an essential tendency to be in a partnership. In this sense, such a partnership norm is portrayed as part of her nature, as it were. There are people who are "relationship-types" and those who are not (Gareth, Nicole or Patti for example: "not bothered", "I am a free bird", "I am a libertine"). This attribute is accompanied by a conscious desire: "I would wish that for myself" ("Das würd ich mir auch wünschen"). This latter statement is one that very generally marks out the vast majority of the respondents' desire to be in a partnership, where differences, as we have seen, appear on various levels, such as the compatibility with other desires, the life

¹¹¹ Original: "Ich bin dann nicht ewig Single, also, garantiert nicht, dafür, da bin ich auch nicht der Mensch [...] Es ist schon so dass man vielleicht sagt, ok, - eingetragene Partnerschaft, - wäre irgendwann vielleicht anzustreben [...] Ich bin da auch n bisschen die Ausnahme. [...] Viele, ja, wenn man noch jung ist, dann, na ja, sind viele noch in vielen Beziehungen drin und da kann sich das alle drei Wochen ändern, von daher denken viele glaub ich nicht daran, die Leben ihre Jugend aus und werden dann vielleicht irgendwann mal einsichtig."

¹¹² Original: "Also, Ich denk ja schon, dass ich ein Beziehungsmensch bin und also das würde ich mir auch wünschen [und] [...] ich [mich] dann irgendwie letztendlich mich niederlasse irgendwo."

phase, or the question of finding the appropriate partner. While the partnership norm is thus widely embraced, the question remains as to what such a partnership looks like. Indeed, as we will see, partnership and the couple take different forms and are defined in a range of different ways by the lesbians and gays interviewed here.

4.4.2. Defining relationship

One of the first impressions in reviewing couple experiences in this limited sample is the diversity of present and past partnership situations, where various respondents do, such as Fabienne or Richard, not really know how to classify their current "relationship". Most of those who are in relationships are not cohabiting. The various situations where partnership is not clearly defined (Gareth, Dorothee, Jérôme, Fabienne) are not particularly representative within the sample: they are rather the exception to the rule, in which firmly committed partnerships are dominant both for those who are in a relationship and for those who are single and describe past or possible future relationships. The description of unclear categories is however particularly important to point to, as the definition of partnership stands as a possible assumption at the basis of the entire research project, and the challenge to it should be given particular attention. Also, interestingly, the description of what we could call unclear partnership definitions cut across gender and age groups. While in Dorothee's case ("I am not officially seeing anyone"/"Je suis avec personne officiellement.") this is portrayed as an initial "trying out phase", Fabienne refers to her friends who say that she was too old to believe in romantic commitment:

Fabienne (Paris, 54)

It's true that I like the idea of finding myself in a life as a couple after all. I like living with somebody. I like to have this desire to share, to enjoy seeing the other person. That's for sure. But she tells me that it is strict and illusionary. That at our age, it doesn't work like that anymore and, - well. But I don't believe any of that. Every time she tells me that I am a romantic or I don't know what, it makes me laugh. [laughs]¹¹³

In this perspective, in stark contrast to the idea that occasional affairs are linked to youth and a firm commitment to maturity (Daniel: "safe haven of marriage"), Fabienne's friend, Nicole, as she describes it, seems to refer to the idea of the committed couple as outdated or not made for

¹¹³ Original: "C'est vrai que j'aime bien l'idée de me retrouver dans une vie de couple quand même. J'aime bien vivre avec quelqu'un. J'aime bien avoir cette envie de partager, de se réjouir de revoir l'autre. C'est sûr. Mais elle me dit que c'est stricte et illusoire. Qu'à nos âges, ça ne se passe plus comme ça et, bon. Mais j'en crois rien du tout. A chaque fois elle me dit que je suis romantique ou je sais quoi mais ça me fait rigoler. [rire]"

the older generation. Thus, accepting the management of a relationship of “occasional lovers” would appear as something grown out of maturity and experience.¹¹⁴

Gareth, who rejected the idea of desiring a relationship (see above), in a certain sense does have a stable sexual partner, a regular lover (“fuck-buddy”), who is himself in a relationship with another man:

Gareth (London, 45)

G: I’ve got a little ehm, what I call my fuck-buddy. [...] So, we go on really well, and it’s like, - I can meet him for a drink, and like, and just sit and talk, or we can go out for a meal or, - and it doesn’t always have to end up like with sex, but, - sometimes it does, so, - and like, so I click with him. So, that makes me happy anyway. But he’s got a boyfriend, who’s, lives in France. [...] And when his boyfriend comes over, he comes over, about every couple of months for two weeks at a time. So I just don’t see him then, so, and I’ve known him for about three years.[...] So, - quite happy with that. [laughs] [...]

FJ: And how often would you see him? Do you see him every, every other week?

G: No, it all depends. It’s like, if I’m busy, I don’t sort of make it. If I’ve got things to do, right, I don’t meet him, right. It’ll be, only about, say, once a month say, we’ll go out and sort of, or we might just meet up. [...] When I meet him it’s like, he’s not a stranger, so it doesn’t matter how long it has been, ‘cause he’s like a friend, as well so. I last saw him, err, three weeks ago. And now his boyfriend’s here, so I won’t see him for a couple of weeks. So, now, all I do, I just wait for him to call me. I don’t call in case his boyfriend’s there. [laughs] Like, he knows about us, but. [...]

FJ: You’ve never met the boyfriend?

G: No. I’d love to really, I’d love to. [laughs]

FJ: [laughs]

G: I’m sure I will one day, [...] well I think it will be alright, ‘cause if he knows about it he’s not going to have a problem, is he?

Gareth provides a label for what we could have referred to as an unclear relationship: “fuck buddies”. The terms of his relationship to the other man are clearly laid out: “Now his boyfriend’s here, so I won’t see him for a couple of weeks. [...] I just wait for him to call me.”

For others, the way that Gareth describes the relationship to his “fuck-buddy” is not seen as a viable description of partnership. But in a significant number of other interviews as well, relationships are described as being lived on an occasional basis, where the status of a “relationship” is not acknowledged. In chapter 2, when considering whether ambiguous or undefined relationships were given sufficient weight in the conducting of the interviews, we considered three other such cases, Christophe, Charles, and Antoine (see chapter 2). As we had seen, Antoine struggled with the category “relationship” when asked to describe his long distance tie to a man:

¹¹⁴ It seems here that Parisian respondents were particularly likely to have such undefined relationships – this observation and possible reasons for this will however be bracketed here.

Antoine (Paris, 50)

FJ: Are you in a relationship at the moment?

A: No.

FJ: No?

A: Well, yes. But very far away. [...] So let's say that I don't know. [...] Let's say no then, it's easier. [...] I can't consider that to be a couple, no. – When we are together, yes. [...] But as now we see each other very little really, let's say that it is, err, -

FJ: How often do you see each other?

A: This year we see each other very, very little. [...] Between what you say and what you do, there are the feelings, so we don't know yet. [...] It's the sixth year, I think. [...] But it's the first time that I am travelling so little. In the other years I sometimes went over there five times a year.¹¹⁵

After a struggle with giving a yes or no answer to the question ("no [...] well, yes [...] but [...] don't know"), he concludes that he would rather say he is not in a partnership, other than when they are "together". The geographical distance provides a concrete reason for the doubt about the relationship that Antoine is experiencing – at the same time, however, the difficulty of defining it indicates an emotional component in this doubt ("what you feel"/"les ressentis"). While his engagement to the other man is unclear, he still does not dismiss the idea of a committed relationship in general, and quite contradictory compared to an earlier passage in which he had rejected the idea of a couple (see Antoine in chapter 2: "Couple relations, their mode of communication, it doesn't interest me."). Quite on the contrary, here, when asked about it, the partner is the central reference; he calls the very question inviting him to imagine the partner as not being central in his life "curieux comme question":

Antoine (Paris, 50)

FJ: So, if you were in a relationship, do you think your partner would be the most important person in your life ? Or, to put it differently, who are the other important people in your life?

A: Well, of course it would be the most important person in my life. [laughs] That's an odd question.

FJ: [...] And which other people let's say, for you now, are the most important ones?

A: Now? Lets say my family and friends. There is no, no, there is no special relationship apart from the one with that boy ("garçon") who is close to me. He remains very important.¹¹⁶

The example of Antoine and the contradictions his discourse implies thus point to the different focus that is given to a "friendship ethics" when presently lived situations are concerned on the

¹¹⁵ Original: "FJ: Est-ce que tu es dans une relation en ce moment ? - A: Non. - FJ: Non ? - A: Enfin oui, mais très lointaine. [...] Donc je sais pas, on va dire. [...] On va dire non alors, c'est plus simple. [...] Je peux pas considérer que c'est un couple, non. Quand on est ensemble oui. [...] Mais comme là on se voit vraiment peu, on va dire que c'est, euh,- FJ: Vous vous voyez tous les combien? - A: Là cette année on se voit très, très peu, voilà. [...] Entre les dire et les faits, il y a les ressentis, donc on sait pas encore. [...] C'est la sixième année je pense. [...] Mais c'est la première fois où je voyage si peu. Les autres années je passais cinq fois par an là-bas."

¹¹⁶ Original: "FJ: Donc si tu avais une relation, penses-tu que ton partenaire serait la personne la plus importante dans ta vie ? Ou, autrement dit, quelles sont les autres personnes les plus importantes dans ta vie ? - A: Ben naturellement ça serait la personne la plus importante dans ma vie. [rire] C'est curieux comme question. - FJ: Pas forcément. – Et quelles, quelles autres personnes disons pour toi, maintenant, sont les plus importantes ? - A: Je pense, là, maintenant ? Ma famille et les amis on va dire. Y a pas, y a pas, non, j'ai pas de relation privilégiée à part celle, ce garçon qui est près de moi. Il reste toujours très important."

one hand, and when an (often desired) hypothetical partnership in the future is concerned on the other, depending on how the question is phrased. Generally, unlike this example, in the interviews, this question was normally asked without reference to a relationship or the partner: "Who are generally speaking the most important persons in your life?". But what we see in this example is a general pattern that sees a potential partner as the central reference point in the respondents' lives. All, with some notable exceptions such as Gareth (and to a lesser extent Nicole), give such a partnership norm as a reference to who would be among the most important people in their lives. The fact here that Antoine describes such an answer as "well of course" ("ben naturellement") and judges the question itself to be "strange" ("curieux") underlines the way in which he sees it as a general norm that would not be challenged by anyone.

In other examples we could point to, respondents instead tell of *their partners* being unclear about the relationship with them, such as in Bianca's case, who describes her relationship of 17 years, in which the woman she was with had a parallel relationship with a man:

Bianca (Rome, 43)

B: She also had a story with a man, you know - something that I never accepted. I accepted it for ten years; I bore this thing, but then ...

FJ: Ah, for ten years there was also a story with a man?

B: After seven years she also had a story with a man.

FJ: Which was then parallel to the one with you?

B: Yes.

FJ: How did you live this thing [...], for ten years?

B: Yes. And there was also a woman, as well.

FJ: [...] If you say you don't like promiscuity, [relating to what she had previously said] how did you live [this]? How did you accept this situation for so long?

B: Well, I see promiscuity in this way, I mean, having relationships. How did I live it, I lived it badly. I was very much in love with this person, but - one hopes it could still change. But then when it doesn't happen, I mean, what do you do? I endured it for ten years, so, after ten years I said, I mean after seventeen years, I said: enough.¹¹⁷

Bianca's description of this unclear relationship definition is fundamentally an unhappy one: "I lived it badly" ("l'ho vissuta male"). She describes the 17-year relationship as a partnership, but at the same time, the description of it resembles a situation that stands in conflict with her

¹¹⁷ Original: "B: Lei aveva anche la storia con un uomo, quindi. - Cosa che io non ho mai accettato. Accettato per dieci anni, ho sopportato 'sta cosa, poi... - FJ: Ah, per dieci anni c'era una storia anche con un uomo?

B: Dopo sette anni - ha avuto una storia anche con un'uomo. - FJ: Che quindi era parallela a quella con te? - B: Sì. - FJ: Come hai vissuto questa cosa, durante, comunque durante sette anni allora? No, durante dieci anni?

B: Sì. E c'era anche una donna pure. - FJ: [...] Se dici che non ti piace la promiscuità, [relating to what she had previously said] come hai vissuto, come hai accettato per tanto tempo questa situazione? - B: Be', la promiscuità, io la sento così, - cioè aver rapporti. - Come l'ho vissuta, l'ho vissuta male. Ero molto innamorata di questa persona, però, - uno spera che possa sempre cambiare. Però poi quando non avviene, cioè. Che fai? L'ho sopportato per diec'anni, quindi. - Dopo diec'anni ho detto, - cioè dopo diciassette anni, ho detto: basta."

own expectations of what a partnership should look like, and, as she explains, was something she hoped would change.¹¹⁸ Yet again, as with Antoine's account, a clear distinction between the desire for a committed relationship (monogamous in Bianca's case) contrasts with a lived situation that refers to types of relationships that fall short of this desire. Hence one needs to distinguish clearly between the desired and the experienced accounts of partnership.

For some, there were periods in which they were not looking for same-sex relationships, but associated homosexuality itself with casual sex, while living heterosexual relationships, such as in Jason's narrative which we saw in chapter 1, ("I wasn't looking for a relationship, I was looking for casual sex") and in Sven's narrative where he said that he had initially considered homosexuality as incompatible with relationships ("For a long time I couldn't imagine having a man living in my house."¹¹⁹ (Compare also chapter 3).

When re-considering the biographical narratives, indeed, it can be noted that throughout the interview material, past heterosexual relationships are portrayed in different ways: either on the same level as the current homosexual ones or as somehow mistakes of the past. Sometimes a past relationship with a partner of the opposite sex is located as before the moment that he or she realized being gay or lesbian. Dorothee for example says concerning her past boyfriend: "and after him, well, I realized that it had always been girls that I preferred, as I had thought from the start."¹²⁰ In her case, the moment of realization functions retrospectively, where she has not changed but rather her consciousness about it has changed. Katharina instead says she would exceptionally also go for men: "I like women, and men as well – I sometimes make exceptions. [laughs]" ("ich steh auf Frauen, - auch auf Männer, - ich mach mal Ausnahmen. "). Many others refer to an early realization that they were homosexual, as Jacques explains his "becoming" gay in his early twenties: "There was no waving of a magic wand. It was rather a slow [...] process of becoming aware of it." ("Y a pas eu un coup de baguette magique, hein. C'est plutôt une lente [...] prise de conscience." Quite differently to

¹¹⁸ Bianca's narrative on her relationship in a small town in Umbria with a woman with whom she was living and who had a heterosexual relationship at the same time, of which nobody else in the town was aware could invite an interpretation that looks more specifically at the construction of lesbian intimacy in a hidden private sphere. It can be argued that lesbians, in contrast to gays, have traditionally enjoyed greater freedoms to accommodate for hidden intimate relationships, but have been denied most of the public visibility that gay men have established. On the development of the private-public debate in feminist theory, see e.g. Leonore Davidoff, "Regarding some 'Old Husbands' Tales': Public and Private in Feminist History." Joan B. Landes (1998), *Feminism, the public and the private*: 164- 194. Such a more detailed perspective with a different focus could however not be fully pursued in this context.

¹¹⁹ Original: ""nen Mann im Haus, [...] das konnt' ich mir lang nicht vorstellen."

¹²⁰ Original: "Et puis juste après lui, ben, je me suis rendu compte que c'était bien toujours les filles que je préférais, comme ce que je pensais bien depuis le début."

Jason's account, Fabienne tells of her past relationships with both men and women, and describes her preference for women as not necessarily being of a sexual nature:

Fabienne (Paris, 55)

F: There was a period in which I didn't know. Well, let's say that I defined myself as asexual. I was attracted to nothing at all. It probably lasted about two years. Well, obviously I slept with men because, well, it's the easiest thing to do. After that I was with a woman, it lasted practically two years. But with her, I still had sexual relationships to men as well. And then I had a man for five years. So there, obviously, completely faithful to him for five years. [...] I still didn't identify as heterosexual. I knew that I was with him but that it would change. [...] I knew that it wasn't him, that it would be a woman in the end, in fact. [...] I really adored him though, I really adored this guy, but I didn't love him. And once that I had managed not to be with him anymore, it was a liberation not to tell myself anymore: "you want both". Because to be both, for me, had been very, very hard, because one day I had the impression of being completely in love with him, and the next day, well no: I feel attracted to a girl. Well, it was awful. And during all that time I never knew. It was really annoying. So at least now, listen, I prefer to be like this, at least it's clear in my head, and that's all you know. And now I have to completely accept it. [laughs]

FJ: What importance do you give to sex, so, sexual activity, in your life? What role does sexuality play in your life, I mean for example compared to other things such as work, friendship and so on?

F: Well, listen, not a great one in fact. Honestly, it's funny, I had just talked about that with a friend of mine earlier on. If I am attracted to a girl it will not be sexual at all. What I am looking for, well, it's not what I am looking for either, but what has already happened to me, is this kind of symbiosis – something that I find is stronger than sex, it's mentally actually. [...] The number of times that I have had platonic stories with girls - which have marked me much more. [...] For me [it's] the fact of being with a person, to have a laugh, do things together, rather than having sex. Having sex is really something [I do], I think, when I really love. But for now that hasn't happened very often.¹²¹

What is noteworthy in Fabienne's longer account, beyond the explicit portrayal of the differences between her heterosexual experiences and her homosexual ones, similar to what

¹²¹ Original: "Il y avait une période où je ne savais pas. Enfin, disons je me définissais comme asexuelle, j'étais attirée par rien du tout. Ça a dû durer deux ans. Bon, évidemment je couchais avec des mecs parce que, ben, c'est la chose la plus facile à faire quoi. Après j'étais avec une nana, ça a duré pratiquement deux ans. Mais avec elle j'avais quand même des relations sexuelles avec mecs en plus. Et après j'ai eu un mec pendant cinq ans. Donc là évidemment complètement fidèle à lui pendant cinq ans. [...] Je m'identifiais quand même pas comme hétéro. Je savais que j'étais avec lui, mais que ça allait changer. [...] Je savais que c'était pas lui, que ce serait une nana à la fin quoi en fait. [...] Je l'adorais quand même hein, bon je l'adorais vraiment ce mec, mais je ne l'aimais pas quoi. Et puis une fois que j'ai réussi à ne plus être avec lui, ça a été la libération, de ne plus me dire « tu veux les deux ». Parce qu'être les deux, pour moi, ça a été très, très dur, parce qu'un jour j'avais l'impression d'être complètement amoureuse de lui, et puis le lendemain, ben non, je pouvais être attirée par une fille. Enfin, c'était affreux. Et tout le temps, je [ne] savais jamais. C'était super chiant quoi. Alors au moins maintenant, écoute, je préfère être comme ça, au moins c'est bien clair dans ma tête et puis, c'est tout quoi. Puis maintenant il faut complètement l'assumer, voilà. [petit rire]

FJ: Quelle est l'importance que tu donnes à la sexualité, donc l'activité sexuelle dans ta vie ? Quel est le rôle que la sexualité a dans ta vie, je veux dire par exemple par rapport à d'autres choses comme le travail, l'amitié et cetera ?

F: Ben, écoute, pas énorme en fait. Moi, franchement, c'est marrant, j'en parlais tout à l'heure avec une copine à moi. Si je suis attirée par une fille, ça ne sera pas du tout sexuellement. Moi, ce que je recherche, enfin, c'est pas ce que je recherche non plus, mais, ce qui m'est déjà arrivé, c'est une espèce de symbiose, un truc, que je trouve qui est plus fort que le sexe, c'est mental en fait. [...] Le nombre de fois où j'ai eu en fait des trucs platoniques avec des nanas, et qui m'ont beaucoup plus marquée en fait. [...] Pour moi [c'est] le fait d'être avec la personne,

we have said above, is the extent to which the question of sexuality is distinguished from both sexual orientation and partnership, at least potentially: "If I am attracted to a girl it will not be sexual at all" ("Si je suis attirée par une fille, ça sera pas du tout sexuellement"). She describes "platonic" experiences as being more fundamental on many occasions: Fabienne thereby underlines a dissociation of sexuality and partnership without challenging the idea of a strong committed partnership, be it with a woman or to a man. Similar to Lasse' description of his "marriage" in which there was no sexual relationship, in Fabienne's account, a relationship is not focused on the sexual aspect. In contrast to Lasse's description of his marriage, however, Fabienne sees this as largely something desirable, ("platonic stories with girls - which have marked me much more", even if an equally sexual relationship appears as a positive element "when I really love" ("si vraiment j'aime").

The examples that have been looked at point at the subtle differences that can be identified between sexual activity, sexual orientation, and partnership norms. Quite often, one needs to distinguish between norms that respondents aspire to and practically lived situations. Ambiguities and a different usage of labels for categories such as partnership arise in a variety of ways, and need to form the background for the analysis of same-sex partnerships and relationship norms. As we have seen, despite these nuances, as a norm that respondents aspire to, a committed relationship is generally referred to in one way or another. In the following, the question of how sexual behaviour is associated with a committed relationship will be reviewed concerning the question of monogamy and "open relationships".

4.4.3. Monogamy and promiscuity, faithfulness and open relationships

Difficulties in labelling relationships, discrepancies between the ambiguity of present relationships, and the clarity of the type of relationships to which the respondents aspire can take various forms. In many cases, as the following section will show, the question concerns whether sexual activity should be confined to a committed relationship, or whether other sexual partners are compatible with such a relationship. It has also proved to be a question that easily triggered long narratives – an indication that it is a common conversation topic for them.

As indicated in the above table, a large number of respondents embrace the idea of a monogamous relationship. However, other forms of more "open" relationships are not unusual,

me marrer, faire des trucs ensemble, plutôt que de coucher avec quoi. Coucher avec, c'est vraiment un truc que je fais, je pense, si vraiment j'aime, mais pour l'instant c'est pas souvent arrivé."

and various respondents refer to them as acceptable options even if they do not apply them to their own relationship. Jason for example refers to other gay couples and describes relationships as being defined according to what "suits them at a time":

Jason (London, 47)

J: The way people think about the relationship depends on who's actually in it. This particular couple [I know] they've been together seven years, never really been interested in seeing anybody else. [...] There are other couples that I know that have been together for ten years or so. And they don't have a monogamous relationship. But the relationship still works for them, because they have so many other things in common. [...] Long-term relationships work when both parties work together to create the kind of relationship that suits them at a time. And I don't think relationships could survive on some static premise of what that relationship should be.

FJ: How is that in your relationship, or how is your opinion about it for your relationship about these questions, you talked about, say to have an exclusive relationship or not?

J: Yeah, yes we do [have an exclusive relationship], and we decided that at the beginning. And that's because it's something that suits us both.

Jason's discourse shows the availability and viability of different sets of norms governing how to define a relationship, and discards a "static premise" of sexual behaviour in this context. He refers to other gay partnerships he has seen to assess what kind of relationships "work". In the case of an "open" couple he says that it "works for them because they have so many other things in common". As he finally stresses though, monogamy is a form of relationship that suits him and his partner ("suits us both"), a judgment that comes after the acknowledgment that it should be a decision based on the specific desires and expectations which both partners in a relationship have.

It may be considered a platitude to point to the diversity of forms that intimate relationships take in a social setting such as the metropolitan gay and lesbian bar milieu. But it is in the light of these differing social realities and opinions, that a consensus becomes somewhat noteworthy on both partnership recognition as a political goal and committed long-term relationships as a goal for them personally.

In talking about the exclusiveness the relationship *has*, *had* or *should have* in the eyes of the interviewees, the considerable differences between situations are often presented in a more problematic way than they are in Jason's discourse. Some of those we have seen already, such as Bianca, unwittingly lived something that could be labelled as an "open" relationship. Various perspectives on such situations inform possible constellations: respondents talk about their own desires and behaviour, but respondents also talk about those they observe in others.

Katharina, who is much younger but has more experience of same-sex relationships compared to Justin, presents a discourse that runs through various possibilities and different goals and values that are weighed either for herself or within a partnership negotiation:

Katharina (Berlin, 22)

K: Yes, well, for me faithfulness is very important. I have always been faithful in my lesbian relationships, at least I did my best to be it. It even, well, always succeeded, although I partly got very close to some sort of situations. But I think that in the future, after my last relationship, I would limit that a little bit, because as long as I feel sexually satisfied and content and so on, then I would not have any reason [for not being faithful]. But I think in the future, if that should not be the case, I think that I would not quite be against the idea of having an affair if my partner does not hear about it. Well, she wouldn't [hear it] from me, well I would look at it more selfishly. Well, yes, I can say that I have had bad experiences with it in the past. I was being cheated on as well, or, as in my last relationship I wasted months on somehow rebuilding the sexual connection that had been lost. And in the end I was the one who lost out, and I think that now I would think more selfishly.

FJ: Do you think that your partner should always be faithful?

K: Generally I would say yes. But it always depends what limits one fixes together, doesn't it? Well I could also very well picture myself perhaps having an open relationship. For me however that would only work if I wasn't too much involved emotionally. Because otherwise I think the jealousy would be too big and well I am not a kind of person probably who can distinguish between love and sexuality in a long term perspective.¹²²

No clearly coherent position is defended in this passage. Katharina hesitates between different values; some statements seem to contradict each other: it remains unclear whether being faithful is seen as good or whether a partner should be told about adventures. It presents the question as one of constant evaluation rather than of principle. A range of different values come into play: fidelity, sexual satisfaction, honesty, time wasted with conflict. And the different values are then balanced out depending on the situation, the partner, the sexual fulfilment with the partner, the emotional involvement the relationship represents etc. This negotiation may be one engaged with the partner, but only under certain circumstances: "I would not quite be against the idea of having an affair if my partner does not hear about it."

¹²² Ja, also, für mich ist Treue auch sehr wichtig. In meinen lesbischen Beziehungen war ich immer treu, habe mich zumindest darum bemüht. Es ist mir auch, na ja, immer gelungen, wobei ich da haarscharf teilweise an irgendwelchen Situationen vorbeigeschrammt bin. Bloß ich glaube zukünftig jetzt nach meiner letzten Beziehung würd ich das etwas einschränken, weil, solange ich mich sexuell befriedigt und zufrieden fühle und so weiter, dann hab ich ja auch gar keinen Grund. Aber, ich denke, zukünftig, falls dies nicht der Fall sein sollte, ich denke ich wäre schon nicht ganz abgeneigt, mal n Seitensprung zu machen, wenn meine Partnerin das nicht erfährt. Also würde sie jedenfalls von mir auch nicht, also, ich würd das dann doch egoistischer betrachten. Ja, also ich hab da, sag ich mal, in der Vergangenheit schlechte Erfahrungen mit gemacht. Ich wurde auch betrogen, oder, wie zum Beispiel bei meiner letzten Beziehung hab ich Monate damit vergeudet, irgendwie den verlorenen gegangenen sexuellen Bezug zueinander wiederaufzubauen. Und letztendlich hab ich mich ins eigene Fleisch geschnitten, und, ich glaube, da würd ich egoistischer denken.

FJ: Denkst du denn, deine Partnerin sollte langfristig immer treu sein sollte?

M: Pauschal würd ich sagen ja, aber, also es kommt immer darauf an, was man miteinander, äh, für Grenzen feststeckt, ne. Also ich könnte mir auch durchaus vorstellen, dass man ne, offene Beziehung führt vielleicht. Wobei das zumindest auf mich bezogen nur dann gehen würde, wenn ich emotional nicht zu involviert wäre. Weil ansonsten glaub ich wäre die Eifersucht zu groß und also ich bin kein Mensch, der so also auf längere Sicht wahrscheinlich Liebe und Sexualität trennen kann.

Promiscuity: gay or lesbian?

The gender aspect, and in particular the direct comparison between lesbians and male gays, has remained very marginal to the overall inquiry – much more could be said in a study that would focus on such a difference. We stated at the outset that this question, whilst being highly relevant, would not form the basis of a systematic inquiry in this study. However, in the context of what is being said here, one question arises, where gays and lesbians respectively are regularly regarded as having quite different approaches to sexuality and partnership. While in the literature on this topic, the differences in, e.g. attitudes to and realization of long-term partnership or numbers of sexual partners are often pointed to, seeing gay men with a generally more promiscuous sexual life than lesbian women, others argue against a systematic difference. As an example, in Barbagli and Colombo's study on homosexuals in Italy, lesbian women of all age groups are significantly more likely than gay men of the same age group to be in a stable relationship.¹²³ In their sample, this sex difference (in both senses of the word) is even more significant when numbers of sexual partners are considered. They report that 40% of homosexual women respondents stated having had no more than 3 sexual partners in their lifetime, while this was the case for only 12% of homosexual men. And while only 12% of women reported having had more than 20 sexual partners, this answer was given by 53% of the male gay respondents.¹²⁴

A decline is often claimed to have taken place concerning male homosexual identity based on sexual libertarianism, which could account for a closing gender gap in this respect. As Barbagli and Colombo point out:

For this generation [gay men in the 1960s and 1970s], casual sex constituted a reference and a resource for their identity. But, from the period between the late 80s and the early 90s, the historical and cultural framework in which homosexual men moved changed again, and the new generation also sought out other instruments for the legitimization its desire.¹²⁵

With data at hand, this development is shown to have been to a large extent a reaction to the advent of AIDS in the 1980s.¹²⁶ In a large quantitative analysis of gay sexual behaviour in France, Michael Bochow et al. point to a similar, in particular generational change in sexual

¹²³ Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*, p. 202. In stable relationship: aged 18-24: men 39%, women 58%; aged 25-29: men 40%, women 54%, 30-34: men 47%, women 70%.

¹²⁴ Ibid: 111. N: 2258 men, 734 women.

¹²⁵ Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*: 115, my translation.

¹²⁶ Ibid: 111-116

behaviour in consequence to AIDS, with the rising importance of the monogamous partnership model. However, they stress that this development is often relative in that it mostly depends on age and the duration of the partnership on the one hand, whilst being undermined by a new rise in multi-partnerships during the early 1990s on the other hand.¹²⁷

Numbers should be taken with extreme care in an inquiry such as this one, where deciding on access to the field has a great impact on the outcome, as does the reliability of the answers, which are not easy to judge on a personal sexuality related question.¹²⁸ However, a different finding in Barbagli and Colombo's study concerning Italy suggests a rather striking similarity concerning both women and men: a similarly small proportion rejects the idea of a long-term partnership in favour of occasional relationships (women 8%, men 12%).¹²⁹ It could thus be argued that the AIDS crisis had the effect, in Western Europe, of assimilating the desirability of long-term commitment for gay men to that of lesbian women on the discursive level, while the same would not be true on the level of sexual practice.¹³⁰

In questioning differences and similarities in gay and lesbian relationship patterns, Giddens argues that differences should not be overrated. He claims:

Short-term, depersonalised relationships: these are by no means absent from lesbian relationships. Given that many gay men establish long-term sexual ties with one another, one should not exaggerate the contrasts between female and male homosexuality.¹³¹

However adding:

Yet episodic sexuality among some gay men is intensified well beyond anything found in lesbian communities.¹³²

¹²⁷ Michael Bochow, Marie Jauffret-Roustide, Alice Michel, Marie-Ange Schiltz. "Les évolutions des comportements sexuels et les modes de vie à travers les enquêtes réalisées dans la presse gay en France (1985-2000)" Broqua, Lert and Souteyrand, eds. (2003), *Homosexualités au temps du sida*, p. 41, referring to data from *Enquêtes Presse Gay*.

¹²⁸ See e.g. Tom W. Smith. "Discrepancies between men and women in reporting number of sexual partners: a summary from four countries." (*Social Biology*, Fall-Winter, 39, 3-4, 1992: 203-11): "Men and women in national surveys from four countries, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Norway, give mutually inconsistent reports of numbers of opposite-gender sexual partners. In all cases the number of female partners reported by men exceeds the number of male partners reported by women. Gender difference in reporting bias seems to be the most plausible explanation for the discrepancies." (p. 203)

¹²⁹ Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*: 202

¹³⁰ On the impact of AIDS on the construction of identity and sexual behaviour, see also: Marie-Ange Schiltz. "Young Homosexual Itineraries in the Context of HIV: Establishing Lifestyles." (*Population: An English Selection*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1998: 417-445). The question of HIV has not been central to the overall analysis here, which can be seen as a flaw. It would be highly valuable to relate the discourses encountered here more specifically to the question of AIDS as a generational factor and its impact on sexual behavior, particularly for gay men. It should be added that AIDS very rarely became a main narrative element when respondents were asked about social change (explicitly only in one interview), which could appear to be surprising, or alternatively as being linked to the design of the questionnaire guide, where no specific reference to AIDS was made.

¹³¹ Giddens (1992), *The Transformation*: 145

Giddens' view in this sense matches the numerical findings of Barbagli and Colombo. In other words, when asked about the aims of partnership as a whole, the differences are not quite clearly as obvious as are those on the numbers of sexual partners. Yet again, it is important to differentiate between the absence of de facto committed relationships and the views on the long-term desirability of having one. The findings in this study partly reflect this. While sexual practice was not the focus of the study, the only explicit question asked on sexual practice, concerning the number of sexual partners during the past two months, shows a clear gender divide, where most women replied one or none, while a majority of men had had at least two sexual partners.

Some female respondents point to the question of gender when discussing questions of monogamy and promiscuity, such as Julia who argues that "most lesbians [...] think more romantically or emotionally":

Julia (London, 36)

Personally I'm a monogamous girl, I prefer to, well, I demand that I'm the only person in my lover's life. I don't want [accentuated:] anybody else to be – outside of that relationship. I don't have a problem with other people having more partners, and I know several, gay male couples with very long term relationships [who] have sex with other men. [...] Personally I would never want to have a relationship like that in my primary relationship. [...] I'm not, not promiscuous. [...] I don't actually think there's anything wrong with being promiscuous. I'm just not made by that. And I think some women are, but not most lesbians, [...] they think more romantically or emotionally, [...] and so it's quite difficult to feel that level of emotion for more than one person at the time. And I think I get everything I need from my primary relationship. So, yeah, for me it's monogamy.

As already pointed out, a gender-divide between male and female respondents seems clear within the samples, and would thereby support Julia's assertions. However, the discourses on this question are multifaceted, and other respondents refer both to male gay culture and lesbian culture as tending towards promiscuity, as we will see in the following.

As a reference frame, many respondents describe experiences and observations of what lesbian and gay life is like in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome, including notably the unlikeliness of monogamy. As Jacques puts it: "The homosexual world is not a milieu that really promotes faithfulness in the relationship."¹³³ Often, respondents observe sexual liberty as a necessity within the relationship, by describing this norm as being accepted by themselves rather than being chosen, and sometimes respondents describe themselves as resisting it. Antonella for

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ Original: "Le monde homosexuel n'est pas un milieu qui favorise tellement la fidélité conjugale."

example describes how important being faithful is for her, despite how common she finds "betrayals" to be in homosexual relationships:

Antonella (Rome, 24)

A: And I think that sexuality is a fundamental component of a couple. But I can tell you that cheating is very common in the homosexual couple. Yes. Why that is I wouldn't know.

FJ: Yes.

A: But I noticed that it is very frequent. I was cheated on by my ex-girlfriends. I saw so much cheating among my [female] friends, with other persons, falling for someone. I see that. Myself though, if I am with a woman, I don't make a difference compared to [being] with a man. That means that I give in the same way.¹³⁴

Antonella, who described herself as bisexual, implicitly portrays a homosexual norm of "betrayal" on the one hand, and a heterosexual norm on the other hand that seems to be one of monogamy. In resisting this "cheating" norm, she underlines that she would have the same attitude to a woman as to a man: "I don't make a difference compared to [being] with a man".

As we have seen above, in contrast to Julia's description that drew a clear contrast between lesbians and male gays, Dorothée argued the opposite, in the Parisian context, and had explained that while she had previously believed in such a distinction she "just noticed that in fact girls are the same":

Dorothée (Paris, 26)

I don't see much faithfulness around me. [...] It's really very short, very ephemeral relationships in fact. [...] I thought that it was different for the blokes, and now I have just realized that in fact the girls are the same.¹³⁵ [compare chapter 3]

From the sample of this study, and for methodological reasons, it is difficult to assess fully the gender-based difference here. In addition to the non-representative character of the sample, some differences may arise from the "accepted" discourse, where traditionally, male sexuality had been disclosed more light-heartedly in sociological research. The fact that all interviews were conducted by a man adds to this. Promiscuity was not absent from the lesbian narratives. Interestingly, city differences appeared specifically for women where female respondents in London were subscribing to faithfulness more than in Rome or in Berlin. (See table above for an overview) Negotiated openness, which we are turning to now, was altogether absent from

¹³⁴ Original: "M: E io penso che la sessualità sia una componente fondamentale in una coppia. E, - però, ti posso dire che il tradimento - nelle coppie omosessuali - è molto frequente. Sì. - Il motivo non te lo saprei dire. Però, - FJ: Sì. - M: ... io ho notato ch'è molto frequente. Io sono stat tradita dalle mie ex, ehm, - ho visto tantissimi tradimenti tra le mie amiche, con altre persone, sbandate. Questo lo vedo. - Io però, nel momento in cui sto con una donna, non faccio differenza che con un'uomo. Cioè, io do allo stesso modo."

¹³⁵ Original: "Je vois pas beaucoup de fidélité autour de moi. [...] C'est vraiment des petites relations assez éphémères en fait. [...] Je pensais que c'était différent pour les mecs, et là je viens de me rendre compte en fait que les nanas elles sont pareilles."

the female respondents to this study, with the exception of Monika in Berlin, who however says she would not want "openness" in practice. Thus, unfaithfulness and promiscuity, in the overall sample, are seen as desirable or acceptable for 10 men, who all advocate that this is to be negotiated within the couple, and 5 women, who all argue that they would not tell their partner about it. This latter solution is defended by any of the male respondents – despite the fact that one of the advocates of negotiated openness admits not having told his partner about this yet (see below). What these numbers quite significantly establish is that negotiated openness is an *accepted discourse* for gay men – even though it is not a dominant one across the board – while it has not become accepted as a *relationship norm* for lesbian women – even though promiscuity is practiced by a significant number and observed in the lesbian milieu by many. In the next section, the idea of "negotiated openness" will be explored further, before turning to non-negotiated promiscuity.

Negotiated openness

In the cases in which the respondents themselves argued for non-exclusive relationships, one can differentiate between those who see it as a matter of negotiation, i.e. the desires and wishes of both partners are negotiated to formulate the rules of the relationship (like Jason), and those who see it as a necessary requirement for any relationship.

Daniel for example approaches the question from another perspective and places negotiation at the centre of his deliberations. In his view, while fidelity remains "important", everything is up for negotiation: the terms of the relationship need to be agreed upon by the partners and can range from a platonic relationship with sexual promiscuity to having occasional lovers:

Daniel (Berlin, 25)

Well, fidelity is important after all. If there are occasional affairs that get in the way then that should simply be discussed beforehand. Well, you can also have a platonic relationship, yes, for example, and then of course you have to get the basic needs satisfied elsewhere, that's unavoidably so. But if you have a relationship then it should be clear that you are having a relationship. And with one person that is, and not with three. or with one today and tomorrow in another way. That then depends on the partner, what his position to that is. You just have to talk about it. Perhaps one can agree then or whatever. Or you just don't fit together.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Original: "Also Treue ist schon wichtig. Wenn da jetzt gelegentliche Affären oder so dazwischenkommen dann sollte man das vorher abklären einfach. Also, man kann ja auch ne platonische Beziehung haben, ja zum Beispiel, und dann muss man natürlich so die Grundbedürfnisse sich anderweitig befriedigen lassen - das ist zwangsläufig so. Aber wenn man ne Beziehung führt, dann sollte schon klar sein dass man ne Beziehung führt. Und zwar mit einer Person und nicht mit drei, oder, heute mal so und morgen mal so. Das ist halt abhängig von dem Partner, wie der dazu steht. Man muss das einfach besprechen. – Vielleicht kann man sich dann einigen oder so. Oder man passt dann nicht zusammen."

Jérôme links the idea of faithfulness to love, both being the ideal for a relationship, even if it may not always be attained:

Olivier (Paris, 39)

O: At the very beginning we were happy, we loved each other, [we were faithful to one another]. Later I started to have doubts. Perhaps one has to accept a range of things.

FJ: Do you think that the partner should be faithful in the long-run?

O: That's a dream. Yes, he should, but you can't impose that.¹³⁷

He points to a negotiation that similarly responds to the partner's needs and desires – he feels that it is a matter of “accepting things” and that he cannot “impose” norms onto his partner.

Hans by contrast talks of the principle of an open relationship as something natural in gay life, and in a much lighter tone, portrays the benefits of sexual experimenting with others for the sexual well-being of the partnership itself:

Hans (Berlin, 50)

If you are generously open about it and you say, I am genuinely happy for my guy to sometimes have some other fun somehow, [...] then [you have] a much better lover, [...] and there I speak about my own experience. [...] When my boyfriend somehow had a horny experience during the night, and you haven't [even] talked about it, but sometimes I just noticed that he simply had [laughingly:] something new on his programme you know, or did something which he didn't do before, and which was nice, and also slept with me with more desire again, you know.¹³⁸

In a very explicit account of a negotiated open relationship, Kevin speaks of his long-term relationship with his German boyfriend, in which the negotiation concerned occasional sex with others individually and in threesomes. Interestingly, in cases where one of the partners were to have sex with someone else, the sexual partner and the act had to be “okayed” by the boyfriend – the negotiation was thus extended to accepting the person and timing in question *explicitly* and *beforehand*:

Kevin (London, 32)

K: [In] the open relationship I had with [Rainer, who is German], my last boyfriend, - for about eighteen months we had an agreement between us that basically, we, as a couple, had sex with other men. In that situation, sexual situation. But we also had an agreement that if we wanted to

¹³⁷ Original: “O: Au tout début on était heureux, on s'aimait, [on était fidèle l'un à l'autre]. Plus tard je suis venu à douter, peut-être qu'il faut accepter quelques choses. - FJ : Est-ce que le partenaire devrait toujours être fidèle à long terme ? - O: Ça, c'est un rêve. Oui, il devrait, mais on ne peut pas imposer ça.”

¹³⁸ Original: “Wenn man damit freizügig umgeht und sagt, ich gönne das ohne weiteres meinem Typen, dass der mal irgendwie n andern Spaß hat, [...] dann [hat man] 'n weitaus besseren Liebhaber, [...] und da spreche ich aus Erfahrung. [...] Wenn mein Freund irgendwie, n geiles Erlebnis gehabt hat, irgendwie in der Nacht, und man zwar nicht darüber gesprochen hat, aber manchmal hab ich s einfach gemerkt, dass der einfach, - [lachend] irgendwatt Neues druff hatte oder so, oder irgendwas gemacht hat, was er vorher nicht gemacht hat, und was nett war, und auch mit mehr Lust wieder mit mir geschlafen hat, ne.”

sleep with other men we could. But it had to be okayed by each other. So for instance if we went out together as we did as a couple, and I just met someone I liked and we got chatting, we swapped numbers. If I then wanted to spend the evening with that person or go up and have a date with that person, it was okayed by [Rainer] - and vice versa. That was just the way that we [did it]. Other couples don't do that, they would probably go off and have sex with somebody or, you know, wouldn't tell their partner. But because we were so [close] in the partnership, that [even] not having a monogamous relationship, we were honest with each other. [...] That worked for us, maybe it wouldn't work with other couples, but it worked for us. [...]

FJ: It had to be said before, basically, before it happened?

K: Yeah, [...] we thought we owed it to each other as a couple, as we were strong friends, to do that. People thought we were mad, but that's how we did it.

FJ: And how often would that happen? [...]

K: Maybe once a month, it was no more than that. [...] [To have threesomes] was the original plan, but, you know, again, that maybe, you know, happened once in a blue moon.

What is interesting concerning the theme of fidelity is the superposition of sexuality, emotions and the construction of partnership. What is striking is the weight given to the negotiation of sexual liberty within the partnership, where the rules within the relationship are most often considered as contractual agreements in which different norms and the interest of the one partner and the other are taken into account. Particularly for many gay men interviewed here, the norm they observe is *precisely* that relationships should not be approached with a preconceived norm, and that rules should be drawn up in agreement instead. The strategies however differ greatly as to the level at which the negotiation take place: is everything to be up for negotiation? Does the partner need to accept, do things go without saying?¹³⁹ The need to negotiate stands in contrast to imported norms such as romantic love, traditional family commitment and the like. The necessity of defining the partnership in those terms thereby represents a liberal partnership norm which ranges from the necessity to accept (Olivier) to the imposition of personal convictions, freedoms or needs (Sven, see above in chapter 3). In this sense then, the negotiations of what a relationship is about often reflects the norms understood as being those of society at large and those understood as established in gay and lesbian culture, where the aspect of "negotiation" and "open relationships" is limited to gay respondents within the sample (except for Monika), while a number of lesbian respondents refer to secret unfaithfulness, as for Dorothée's lover, or for Gabriella or Patti.

Not negotiated

Patti, who is a 38 year-old shop manager in Rome, tells about a conflict between occasional sexual affairs ("storielle" or "scappatelle") and the desire to have a long-term relationship. She

¹³⁹ Concerning these aspects of negotiated partnership, compare: Arnaud Lerch (2002), "Les éthiques conjugales gaies"

mentions having arguments about her sexual affairs with a friend of hers (see also Patti on relationships above):

Patti (Rome, 38)

P: [My friend] for example has always been accusing me, because I have had many stories in this period, right? She accused me, because she told me, now you are [cheating] on Chiara. That's what it would be, right? "You never know what you want!" Well, and they mean that it [would be] right that I should live a long term story, that means a lasting, durable one. [...] In the sense that I have to build a stable relationship. Meaning without playing the free bird ("farfalla"/butterfly) But I am a libertine. [...] I'm not very faithful. [laughs] But I don't consider the affairs to be very important [...] because there is no sentimental tie. [...] That's unfortunately how I am.

FJ: Mm. Yes. Do they also happen in these relationships? With Chiara and Chiara [the present girlfriend and the previous one]?

P: No, with the first Chiara it hasn't. That means I didn't. But I like to play. I mean, I am a bit contradictory, but that's how it is. [laughs] I can't do anything about it. [...] Look: I don't know why it happens sometimes that I cheat on the other one. But it happens. And even loving somebody it happens all the same that I cheat. And I hope that it won't happen again. But I don't know, because I like that game.

FJ: Yes.

P: Unfortunately I like to play.

FJ: And when it happens, or when it happened, did you tell your girlfriend or not?

P: No. Ts. I would never say it.

FJ: [laughs]

P: [laughs]¹⁴⁰

Patti, says that on the one hand she is looking for a serious relationship, but on the other hand the sexual encounters are unavoidable, describing herself as "libertine" and later as "una farfalla" (a butterfly/ in this context: free bird). Similar discourses about non-negotiated promiscuity have been considered above, such as Gabriella's (chapter 2) or various respondents' observations they had reported in connection with other lesbian women.

We have seen various ways in which sexuality and relationships interact throughout the respondents' attitudes. While monogamous relationships have been the most frequent reference within the interview sample, different referential frames were available that dissociated the question of commitment to a long-term partner from sexual activity. Questions

¹⁴⁰ Original: "P: [Una mia amica] mi rimprova da sempre, perché io sono, c'ho avuto molte storielle in questo periodo, no? [...] m'ha rimproverato perché m'ha detto, ora fai la stronza con Sabrina. Che sarebbe questo, no? Invece, "tu non sai mai quello che vuoi!" Cioè, e, loro pensano che è giusto che io mi vivi una storia continua, cioè, duratura, solida. - [...] tipo, che mi devo creare una relazione fissa. Cioè, senza, cioè, fare la farfalla. Però, sono libertina. [...] Io non sono molto fedele. [ride] Però importanti non le considero le scappatelle [...] perché non c'è un legame sentimentale. [...] Io purtroppo sono così. - FJ: Mm. - Sì. - Succedono anche, sono anche successe nel, in queste relazioni? Con Sabrina e Sabrina? - P: Eh, no, con Sabrina, la prima no. Cioè io non avevo. Però mi piace giocare. Cioè io, sono, sono un po' contraddittoria, ma è così, [ride] non ci posso fare niente. - [...] guarda: - io non lo so perché mi capita certe volte di tradire. Però mi capita. Eh, - pure amando una persona, comunque mi capita di tradire. E io spero che non mi capiti più. Non lo so. - Però. - Perché mi piace il gioco. - FJ: Sì. - P: Purtroppo mi piace giocare. - FJ: E quando succede questo, o quando è successo, hai, l'hai detto alla tua compagna, o no? - P: No. - Ts. - Non lo direi mai. - FJ: [ride] - P: [ride]"

of sexual freedom were of central importance to some respondents while others raised such a concern as possibly important to the partner and would therefore need to be "accepted".

4.4.4. Intimacy and interviewing

Finally, a methodological point that was briefly mentioned earlier should be pursued further with regards to this last thematic section. Particularly when, as has been done here, indications are given about how frequent discourses appear within the sample, the question arises as to how intimate the topics discussed are. It needs to be recalled that they are being discussed with a researcher who is a stranger to them, and most often the interview is held in a public setting, where other people might listen into the conversation (with the exception of the interviews with Nicole and Hans which were conducted in their respective flats). Some were held in parks (Mario and Dario respectively). Considering the richness of the discourses that were obtained, it does not seem that respondents were particularly inhibited from talking about sexual behaviour and other aspects of intimacy. The format of anonymous in-depth interviews seemed to be particularly conducive to rather uninhibited conversations. But regardless of the degree of inhibition, on topics such as promiscuity, it is generally likely that the resulting discourses of any social science survey are closely linked to what respondents view as *viable* discourses within the setting (e.g. sitting in a gay café with a sociology student who is in his late 20s and assumed to be gay) rather than a truthful biographical account. We should therefore see the analysis of the answers within this section as reflecting a reasonable richness of normative frames that respondents observe concerning lesbian and gay relationships rather than reflecting representative proportions on how partnership is lived or desired.

However, in questioning the likelihood that the respondents' divulge secret or intimate aspects of their intimacy, as a side-note, two interviews can be referred to in which it appeared that the interviewer was told a lot about secret elements of their intimacy. Dario and Mario, who, as we have mentioned before, are a young couple of two months, were contacted jointly at the "Coming Out" bar in Rome. They were interviewed separately over the following weeks. Concerning the question of how they envisaged sexuality within their relationship, Dario insisted that a monogamous relationship was the unquestionable "basis" for any relationship, as we had already seen in chapter 3:

Dario (Rome, 23)

Well of course, [faithfulness] has to be – absolute. [...] If that's not there, if there is no faithfulness, then there is no relationship [...] If there is another person, at that point the bases for being together are no longer there. That's for sure.¹⁴¹

If there is no “total” monogamy, for him, as he says here, “there is no relationship”. To the surprise of the interviewer, things were presented very differently by his “boyfriend”, who in the interview told about other sexual encounters:

Mario (Rome, 25)

M: When I get to know a person, or when I have been with him for a very short time, it's something that I make clear. That means, in the sense: “What do you think about cheating?” That's a thing, a question that with me comes always out often because for me it's an important thing. And then, I said, whether that happens or it doesn't happen is another matter. But it's something that needs to be talked about, because it's very important. It has its weight, that's for sure. [laughs]

FJ: And with Dario, has this case happened?

M Well, it happened with Dario, yes, that I cheated on him has happened. And that was in a moment of weakness. It happened that I could have cheated on him on other occasions and I didn't. [...] Yes. I did. I haven't yet talked about it with him. [...] But, hum, I'm sure that as soon as the occasion comes up we will discuss it. You know what it is? I'm still getting to know him. And with the fact that I don't yet know him, I don't want to restrict myself; [laughs] I'm talking very egoistically: [...] if something else comes up I will try. [...] But it's for sure something I will talk about with him as well.¹⁴²

Both the occasions on which Mario had “cheated” on his boyfriend and his general attitude as to how relationships should be regarding sexual promiscuity were things he had not talked about with Dario, as he says in this passage. But he is rather uninhibited in formulating them to the interviewer. In other terms, the discourse that is presented to the interviewer, in this case, presumably divulges more about his sexual behaviour than he would divulge to people he is very close to, in particular to his boyfriend. It is interesting to note, however, that while his sexual behaviour (“cheating”) had been the same as Patti's or Gabriella's, he frames it in terms of negotiated openness, and sees such a frame as being acceptable and desirable - unlike Patti or Gabriella who portray it as a contradiction or a weakness of character they happen to have – and does this despite the fact that he has not actually raised it with his partner. In Mario's case,

¹⁴¹ Original: “La fedeltà] deve essere – totale. [...] Se non c'è fedeltà allora non c'è – non c'è relazione. [...] Se c'è un'altra persona, a quel punto non ci stanno più le base per stare insieme. Questo è sicuro.”

¹⁴² Original: “M: Quando conosco una persona, o che ci sto da pochissimo, è una cosa che io metto in chiaro. Cioè nel senso che ne pensi tu delle corna?. Questa è una cosa, un discorso che con me esce sempre spesso. Perché per me è una cosa importante. E poi, ho detto, ci siano o non ci siano è un conto. Però una cosa che bisogna parlarne. Perché è importantissimo. C'ha il suo buon peso, quello sicuramente. [ride]
FJ: E con Fabrizio, è successo che c'era questo caso?
M: Eh, con Fabrizio è successo, sì, che io gli abbia messo le corna è successo. È stato un momento di debolezza. Mi è capitato di potergli mettere altre corna ma non gliel'ho messe. [...] sì. Gliel'ho messe. Non ne ho ancora parlato con lui. [...] Però, mmm. – Son sicuro che appena capiterà l'occasione che ne parleremo. Sai che è? Sto ancora conoscendolo. E col fatto che ancora non lo conosco, non mi voglio privare di, - [ride] ti parlo in maniera molto egoistica: [...] se mi capita altro, - lo provo. [...] Sicuramente però è una cosa che parlerei con lui anche.”

negotiation of openness is thus presented as an acceptable norm rather than reflecting his present behaviour.

What can be concluded from this example is that the discourse held in the interview situation is not necessarily one in which respondents refrain from divulging secret elements of their biographies – the opposite can be true and discourses can be more “truthful” than everyday life discourses towards their social surroundings. However, the resulting discourse, even then, is to be seen within that interview setting and triggered by the social setting it represents. A distinction between male and female respondents that was noted concerning sexual behaviour, for example, could also be based on the fact that the interviewer was male – generalizations towards patterns of responses should be treated with care. The considerations drawn from the example of Dario and Mario underline the aim in representing the discourses as being one that focuses on the type of discourses that emerge, rather than the distribution of them throughout the sample.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, discourses on marriage and the family, social change, partnership and sexuality have been reviewed. The question as to whether there should be marriage and/or civil partnership elicited a prevalent equality discourse that mostly implied support for same-sex marriage on grounds of this principle. Most nuances beyond this general pattern concerned the question as to whether this claim was regarded as central or not, and some differences appeared when the question of parenting arose. A number of respondents argued against same-sex marriage altogether, either on conservative grounds, or because they saw marriage as an outdated and flawed institution. Some, in contrast to the equality discourse, pointed to the specificity of homosexual relationships and homosexual lifestyles, and favoured registered partnership or declined the idea of same-sex parenting on the same grounds.

In analysing the discourses on social change, we saw a generally shared discourse of social progress, in which an increased acceptance of homosexuality in society was outlined. However, discourses were much more nuanced when specific groups within society or persons in the respondents' social environments were concerned. Often, negative attitudes towards homosexuality were pointed out in some areas or in some respects. A small number of

respondents declined the idea of progress, suggesting the possibility of reversal or pointing to more accepting periods in the past.

Thereafter, personal projects and behaviours rather than general observations and opinions were considered. Remarkably, as far as projects for formalizing partnership were concerned, discourses were far more diverse and often diametrically opposed to one another. On the question of possible plans for marriage or civil partnership, a range of typologies were laid out that ranged from a clear embracing of symbolic and material aspects of those institutions, both by singles and by respondents in long-term relationships, to those who categorically rejected the option for themselves. The different rationales inherent in the discourses included very different connotations that were associated with marriage or registered partnership, and different formulations of the concept of commitment. Also, it was pointed out that the institutions were defined in various ways. Value judgments about marriage for example therefore greatly depended on how marriage was defined, and how consequentially definitions were potentially re-appropriated.

Concerning partnership and sexuality, the analysis had shown a certain consistency in that values of commitment and liberty were very often portrayed as being fundamental. One respondent rejected partnership altogether (and another one less clearly so), whereby the definition of partnership was reviewed in the light of alternatives, such as long-term occasional lovers. Speaking in terms of their relationships or hypothetical future relationships, all other respondents outlined a committed relationship as an aim for themselves. Within this perspective, however, very different discourses emerged. The example used at the end of this section was the question of sexual exclusiveness: while a majority of respondents embraced the idea of a monogamous long-term relationship as an expectation and as an ideal, others either underlined the idea of negotiating sexual behaviour within a partnership or embraced an "open relationship" irrespective of negotiation. Some regarded a certain degree of promiscuity as being unavoidable but would not tell their partner about it, thus maintaining a norm of monogamy towards him or her on the level of the couple discourse.

This chapter has been based on typologies that were retrospectively formulated by the researcher in order to frame the discourses in the interview material. Sometimes respondents contradicted themselves within the interviews, and the most appropriate description had to be chosen by the researcher despite the fact that some quotes might have stated a different

position. Rather than the proportional distribution, the range of discourses was of central concern; the contextual meaning of them is deeply linked to the narrative perspective proposed in chapter 3.

In linking such an analysis back to the main research question, a holistic interpretation of the discourses provides a differentiated picture of what the recognition of same-sex couples means to the lesbians and gays interviewed for this study. The analysis of the discourses has shown up complexities of evaluation that help to differentiate between various aspects of the advent of the recognition of same-sex couples. In reviewing elements of partnership norms, social change towards homosexuality and the pragmatic legal elements of partnership registration, the diverse effects of the changes have been explored. As has become clear, the changes can be evaluated from various angles, where the individual concerned often skilfully uses the social norms which he or she perceives to fit in equally with chosen identities, life projects and desires, while re-appropriating or criticizing elements within the received pictures. "Recognition" is here not lived as a single, uniform event, but as a complex shifting of norms that can be tackled with a variety of tools: it can be described as a process of embracing, criticizing, distancing, and re-appropriating new images of homosexuality, partnership and social and legal inclusion, where norms emerge both from "within" gay and lesbian culture and from society at large.

How do these discourses in their multiple functions link in to the identity construction itself? In the next chapter, the remaining thematic context of public identities will be looked at from a more analytical perspective, drawing on social theory approaches to identity construction. While this chapter has moved the analysis from the perspective of biographical narratives in chapter 3 to a perspective that compared differently constructed discourses according to typologies, the next chapter will inquiry into the theoretical understanding of public identity, identity construction more generally and link it in to a theoretical understanding of recognition.

Chapter V

Public Identities, Identity Management, and Recognition

In this chapter, the thematic angle of public identity will be reviewed. As will be seen, in its treatment of the narratives that will be considered, this chapter will cover most aspects of what is often described as the question of "coming out". How does this question relate to the recognition of same-sex couples? First, the central theme of the thesis concerns the impact which the recognition of same-sex partnerships has on the construction of gay and lesbian identities – and these are inherently linked to the question "who knows about it?" – in other terms, this chapter will first look at what the basis of gay and lesbian identity is in order then to analyze the role that recognition, legal reforms and social transformations play in this process. Secondly, the possibility of "marrying" can itself be regarded as a form of "coming out" – in announcing a homosexual identity in the most public way possible.¹

However, no linear view of a "coming out" process will be adopted. Instead, the question of the expression of public identities will be linked to an inquiry into identity and recognition in more general terms. The question of public identity was formulated as one of the five main themes of the questionnaire guide for the interviews and in the structure of our analysis provides the link to a theoretical analysis of the concepts of identity and recognition. The chapter thus addresses the central question of how recognition is experienced or understood by the respondents. The manner in which identity is lived in different public spheres will be analyzed. Through such an understanding, public identity and the recognition of social norms will be seen as interactive elements of identity construction and social change.

The structure of this chapter moves from the more empirical description of how lesbian and gay identities are lived in specific social settings, at the beginning of the chapter and similar to the thematic presentations in the previous chapter, to a theoretical reformulation of the concept of recognition at the end of the chapter. Thus, in the first of three sub-sections, the question of public identity will be analyzed through the use of the respondents' discourses. Different social spheres and everyday environments will be looked at, in which public, private or secret

¹ See e.g. Eric Fassin's reference to publicly staged marriage ceremonies as "the incarnation of the most public form of the *coming out*" ("la forme par excellence, parce que la plus publique, du *coming out*" [original emphasis]). "Lieux d'invention: l'amitié, le mariage et la famille après Michel Foucault." Fassin (2005), *L'inversion*: 93-102, quote on p. 99.

gay and lesbian identities are lived. In contrast to the framework of "coming out narratives" no systematic linear progression from a "hidden" identity to an "open" one is considered as framing the question of how identities are lived. In the second sub-section, the ways in which identities are lived will be understood as strategies of identity management (in a Goffmanian perspective), guided by constraints and ideologies concerning how identities can or should be lived in specific settings. Finally, in the third sub-section, the concept of recognition will be discussed according to such an understanding of identities. Axel Honneth's understanding of recognition will be reviewed. It will be concluded that in such a Social Theory approach, recognition is best understood as the recognition of social norms within different spheres. This view will provide the most useful perspective on identity construction under conditions of social change. It will thereby provide a link to the final chapter, in which the transformed normative context concerning homosexuality and partnership will be discussed more specifically with reference to the norms which the current transformations imply: as based on a normative underpinning of equality, reciprocity, openness and coherence, that however, encounters a range of ambiguities in social realities.

5.1. Public Identity

The degree of acceptance of gay and lesbian lifestyles has a great influence on how lesbian and gay identities are lived. We saw in the section 4.2. on social change discourses that most respondents find "being lesbian or gay" easier today than in the past, either as based on their own experience or on an imagined idea of the past, and many gays and lesbians in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome embrace open and public gay and lesbian identities. Many do not think of problems or conflicts when disclosing their homosexuality to friends, family, at work, or when showing affection to a partner in public. Others however do. The range of different narratives which the respondents provide on how they live their everyday lives partly reflects the discourses on acceptance and social change, both the observations on an increasingly accepting society and on the difficulties that remain.

Two aspects of how gay and lesbian identities are lived in public (or not) can be distinguished in reviewing the discourses. Under one perspective, specific persons and settings are referred to (and were asked for in the interview if they were not brought up). To exemplify this, we shall look at the contexts most often referred to: parents and the workplace. These social contexts prove to trigger the most extensive narratives in interviews, and they are generally

widely discussed in the literature, mostly withing the narrative context of "coming out" processes.² Under a second perspective, a more abstract notion of being publicly lesbian or gay will be discussed – the example or image used in the questionnaire was "showing affection to a partner on the street" – and notions of societal acceptance and the respondents' public identities will be discussed along both these lines.

Openly lesbian/gay

	Both to parents and at work	At work (parents n/a)	At work only	To parents only	Not talked about	To Neither / Closeted
B	Simone Hans Nadine Monika Andreas Daniel Sven	Thorsten	Katharina			Jenny Petra
L	Miguel Gemma Lasse Harriet Anne Kevin		Matthew	Mark Jason Owen (short-term job) Julia		Gareth (parents n/a)
P	Fabienne (w n/a) Jérémy Olivier Antoine	Jacques		Julien	Christophe	Nicole (pa. n/a) Léa Dorothée
R	Marianna (w n/a) Mario	Michele	Bianca Claudia Raffaele		Angelo Carlo Luisa	Dario (w n/a) Antonella Patti Elena Gabriella

² The question of the coming out narrative will be returned to below. Generally, however, on the question of the Coming Out see e.g. Erixon, (1999) *Réflexions*; Barbagli and Colombo (2001); *Omosessuali moderni*; Plummer (1995), "Coming Out". Fassin (2005), *L'inversion*. Most broader studies include these question. See e.g. overview analysis in Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*, chapter 2: "Uscire allo scoperto": pp. 65-85. Particulary concerning the family: e.g. Charlotte J. Patterson and Anthony R. D'Augelli (eds.). *Lesbian, gay, bisexual identities in families*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Marie-Ange Schiltz quantitative analysis in Schiltz (1998), "Young homosexual itineraries", section 2: "A non-standard sexual orientation: from secrecy to self-assertion" (pp. 421-424). For homosexuals at work, in the UK context see e.g. campaigns and studies by the LGBT union Unison (www.unison.org).

5.1.1. Out and the city: typologies and geographical variations

The typologies that have been constructed here, alongside the two elements of “being out” with parents on the one hand, and at the workplace on the other, show geographical distinctions in their distribution. Berlin stands out as the city in which most are “out” in both respects. London stands out in that more than elsewhere respondents are not “out” at their workplace despite being “out” to their parents. Compared to these first two cities, Paris stands out for its large proportion of respondents who are “out” neither to their parents nor at the workplace. And finally, Rome is the only city in which a vast majority of respondents are not “out” to their parents (only two in the sample of fourteen). In contrast to the London-based sample, no respondent in Rome is “out” to her/his parents but not “out” at work. Remarkably, these distinctions are overall far less clear as to gender differences or age groups variations.³

Different cultural hypotheses can be invoked in order to account for such differences, if they are to be regarded as significant. Despite the small size of the samples, the observed differences may be regarded as significant particularly where they are supported by the narrative material itself. There seem to be specific cultural contexts attached to some work environments in London (many refer to “the City” – jobs in financial institutions, but also to the IT sector), which make that some respondents who are otherwise “out” tend to be private about it at their workplace.⁴ In Paris, yet again, it seems that “privacy” can more easily be attached to situations at work, and independence from parents here seems higher overall. In Italy, the family seems to play a large and often complicated role. In other words, the concept of “parents” in Italy (“i miei”) may not mean the same thing as “parents” in England for example. The high number of respondents who would not be “out” to their parents also reflects on South Italian families: none of the four respondents who are originally from the

³ Some observations can however be made: more women are in the (closeted) “neither” group (9 women to 3 men). This indication seems partly supported by discourses in which hidden lesbian lives are more easily integrated into mainstream appearances. But the findings here are not conclusive. Concerning the respondents’ age, one can observe that the older respondents are slightly more “out” than the younger ones. This may seem counter-intuitive if the supposedly observed trend is considered that the “younger ones” “come out” more easily”. However, two logics apply: besides the generational question, the question of the life phase seems to be the decisive factor here: more of the younger respondents will be “out” with respect to their parents and their colleagues over their lifetime. This interpretation is possibly supported by the fact that the categories in which respondents are “out” in one of the two quoted settings tend to be younger.

⁴ These sectors are on the whole far less common as an employment among the respondents in the other three samples: Only one respondent works in IT in Paris, one in IT in Rome, one in insurance in Rome; no respondent works in the finance sector in Berlin, Paris or Rome. In Berlin, no respondent works in either of the two sectors.

South is "out" to the parents: Patti (Sicily), Antonella (Calabria), Bianca (Puglia) and Raffaele (Puglia)⁵.

In looking at a comparison between Italy, France and Germany on those matters, the trend observed here is the same as Barbagli and Colombo refer to in reviewing quantitative research conducted in the three countries during the 1990s: for gay men only, the following percentages had been "out" to the mother/father respectively: Germany 72/54, France 61/47, Italy 56/44.⁶ The interviews here do not suggest a difference of this nature between mothers and fathers.⁷ Results from our study, besides the unreliable numbers they are based on, could have turned out to be very different due to its focus on the metropolitan bar scene (rather than the homosexual population of the countries on the whole) – or yet again due to the fact that it is a more recent study. All in all, the interviews seem overall largely supportive of the respective comparative positioning of the three countries. However, the country-based cleavage is far more accentuated in our sample here. And one difference in particular stands out quite significantly: the difference between the Roman findings and the rest are much more pronounced.

Rome as a city within Italy might have a particular standing, e.g. compared to the North of Italy. Yet again, the composition of the Roman bar scene might well be an additional factor: the number of lesbian and gay locations is much more limited here (there is only one bar that fully corresponds to the characteristics according to which the bars were selected in the other cities, the "Coming Out"), and it could be assumed that a more restricted proportion of lesbians and gays frequent them on a regular basis. It might well be that in Rome, those who find more acceptance within their social environment, e.g. at work and among their friends, will socialize elsewhere. However, this interpretation is purely speculative – it could equally be argued, on the contrary, that those who go to the lesbian and gay locations are more likely to be "out", and that on those grounds the low proportion within the bar frequenters is even more dramatic as a result compared to the proportions in the other cities.

These reflections remind us of the milieu character of the fieldwork in the four cities and the limitations this entails. As a consequence of the research design of this study, its

⁵ Patrick is from Liguria, Gabriella from Latina in the Lazio region, the other eight respondents were all born in Rome.

⁶ Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*: 71

⁷ No respondent was "out" to one parent but not to the other, unless they were not in contact with their father at all (e.g. Gemma).

contextualization regarding the historical, geographical, cultural, political and commercial perspectives in the specific city contexts cannot be fully developed. Various such analyses exist or are being undertaken in a range of academic disciplines, including history and geography.⁸ Both on the basis of such studies – for example concerning the recent development of the Marais in Paris or Soho in London⁹ – and through further investigation, much more could be said about the interplay between these specific contexts and the theoretical points that have been raised here. Conclusions about the proportional relevance of the gay and lesbian bar milieu within a wider “homosexual population” in the four cities beyond the limited samples that have been attained in each city remain speculative at this point.

As far as the research question involving identity construction is concerned however, it is important to note that despite the large differences in proportion, the *kind* of discourses we find in the four cities concerning the expression of the respondents’ lesbian or gay identity to their parents and at work largely occur throughout. In the following, the presentation of interview extracts will partly reflect the geographical occurrences of “being out” (and, to a lesser degree: “coming out”) discourses. However, here again, the main focus will be on the discursive logic the narratives contain rather than on their distribution throughout the sample.

5.1.2. Identities and Parents

“Being out” or “not being out” to one’s parents is a topic that triggered extensive biographical narratives in most of the interviews. As can be seen in the table above, large groups of the sample belong to either group – by adding columns 1 and 4 for “being out to parents” and 3 and 6 for “not being out to parents” – with just slightly more “being out” to their parents than not.

⁸ As an example, on a historical perspective on twentieth century London: Matt Houlbrook. *Queer London. Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

⁹ Again, as an example, on the recent development of Soho, from an urban geography perspective: Johan Andersson’s recent work and PhD (forthcoming): Johan Andersson. “Consuming Visibility: Gay Men in Commercial and Public Space. London’s West End from 1990 to the present.” Bartlett School of Planning, University College London.

"They don't know anything"

Mostly, the decision not to tell parents about their homosexuality is related to the hostile attitudes which parents have displayed or are assumed to have. Gabriella for example explains that she had tested the topic and decided that it should rather stay "her own (private) matter":

Gabriella (Rome, 39)

G: Homosexuality is a perversion for them. They continue to think that homosexuality is an illness.

FJ: Have you talked about it with them?

G: I have talked about it, but not speaking of me. I spoke about it, I saw their reaction. Always: Ah! Oh! Continuously. So I said, ok, that's my own business. [...] They still see me as a person who hasn't found a husband yet. [laughs] It's a bit of an old-fashioned idea.¹⁰

In this extract, we can see that Gabriella draws on particular occasions in which her parents have been hostile to homosexuality to justify her choice of maintaining her image of a woman "who has not yet found a husband". Her narrative claims that she tested the grounds for her parents potential reaction and comments her decision with a certain content: "So I said, ok, that's my own business" ("Perciù ho detto, va bene, questo sono fatti miei"). She does not distinguish between her mother and her father. As we had seen in chapter 4, in a previous passage, Gabriella is apologetic about her parents' point of view as being a matter of generations. She refers to fascism rather than to religion as accounting for their hostility:

Gabriella (Rome, 39)

My mother was born in 39. [...] These people have lived a period in which it was taboo, it was forbidden. During fascism it was very risky. So it is difficult for them [...] to be able to really [accept it].¹¹ [Compare longer quote in chapter 4]

The fact that she is not out is thereby not lived as a conflict, but rather as a communicative barrier between generations, which is approached with a certain feeling of superiority: her mother will never "be modern" even if she "wants to". The decision to leave her parents ignorant as to her own intimate life is one that lies with Gabriella alone ("my own business"/"fatti miei").

¹⁰ Original: "G: L'omosessualità è una perversione per loro. [...] continuano a pensare che sia una malattia, l'omosessualità. - FJ: Non hai mai parlato con loro? - G: Ne ho parlato, non parlando di me però. Ne ho parlato, ho visto la loro reazione, sempre: Ah! Oh! Sostenuta. Perciù ho detto, va bene, questo sono fatti miei. [...] Mi vedono ancora come una persona che non ha trovato marito. [ride] E un po' - un po' un'idea antiquata."

¹¹ Original: "È del trentanove mia madre, [...] questa gente ha vissuta in un periodo in cui era tabù, cioè, era vietato, durante il fascismo si rischiava grosso, quindi è difficile [...] che loro possano poi veramente [accettarlo]."

Others however, unlike Gabriella, see such an impossibility of integrating their own intimate lives with their respective parent-child relationships as a difficulty, and as a situation they suffer from. Antonella for example describes "hiding" it from her parents as "suffocating":

Antonella (Rome, 24)

They would never be able to accept it. Well, I think that my mum and my dad would get a heart attack and would reject me as their daughter. And that's also a problem for the future, because if one day I really want to construct something with a woman, I would have to keep it a secret before a slice of my life that is a fundamental to me, because I have esteem for my parents. I really love them; they give me everything; they support me in anything. And so I couldn't say: "Mum, I have fallen in love with a woman with whom I would want to go and live together." And not being able to do it, continuously having to hide [it], becomes suffocating. I actually [altogether] avoid going down [to Puglia]. But to say something silly: even in how people dress. Me, when I am there, I dress completely differently from here. Here I go out with messy hair, there I don't. If I want to wear baggy trousers, if I feel like it, there I can't do it.¹²

Antonella portrays her parents as "a slice of my life that for me is fundamental", "they give me everything". The discrepancy between her intimate life which she is at present sharing with her girlfriend and her identity towards her parents is seen as highly problematic, and particularly so if she considers the future: "a problem for the future", "to hide [it], becomes suffocating". The distinction becomes a geographical one: a lesbian identity she is living in Rome, where she studies, and one that conforms to her hometown when she travels South ("going down", "scendere"), involving both the hiding of her sexual identity as well as altering the clothes she wears. The conflict affects her lifestyle in that she "avoids" going to see her parents, in order not to "hide" herself in a "suffocating" way.

Similar to Antonella's account, Léa tells of protecting her parents from "an additional worry" and from deception:

Léa (Paris, 30)

My parents don't know about me. I haven't told them because actually they have enough on their plate as it is. So I wouldn't want to trouble them, because, as I have told you, I live in a small town where it's really something that is far removed from their world, that is seen as something bad, and I don't want this to add an additional worry to the ones they have already. So I haven't told them about it. And as my father sees me as someone exceptional, someone who has achieved everything in life, someone whom he is proud of, I think that he pictures me being with a decent person, with a good standard of living, with children, with a house. He sees

¹² Original: "Loro non lo potrebbero proprio accettare. Cioè, penso che mia mamma e mio padre li prenderebbe un infarto e mi ripudierebbero come figlia. E questo è anche un problema per il futuro. Perché se io un domani veramente io voglio buttare delle basi con una donna, eh, io lo dovrei tenere nascosto ad una fetta della mia vita che per me è fondamentale. Perché io stimo i miei. Io gli voglio un sacco di bene, loro mi danno tutto, mi sostengono in qualsiasi cosa. E quindi non potrei dire, mamma, mi sono innamorata di una donna con cui vorrei andar a vivere. E non poterlo fare, dover nascondere continuamente, diventa soffocante. Infatti io evito di scendere. Ma se ti dico una cavolata, anche nel modo di vestire. Io giù, vesto completamente diverso come vesto qua. Qui esco con i capelli scapigliati, giù no. Se devo vestire con pantaloni larghi, che mi sento così, io giù non lo posso fare."

me - , the poor [man], when I will tell him what is happening in my life, his life will be turned upside down.¹³

Léa portrays her parents very positively and with affection. She associates the difficulty of accepting her homosexuality with the town where they live, a small town in the North of France, rather than to her parents' own point of view. The potential "worries" thus arise from the attitude which the town as a social entity has, and from the fact that it is "seen as a bad thing". Irrespective of what they might think of it, being involved by knowing about her lesbian identity would constitute a burden. For her father, though, it seems that homosexuality is not feasibly associated with the idea of "success", which refers to her career as a police woman: "My father sees me as someone exceptional, someone who has achieved everything in life [...] his life will be turned upside down." As a value judgment, her father, according to Léa's expectation, endorses the idea of homosexuality being a "bad thing" that she sees as the social norm in her hometown. It is juxtaposed with "exceptional", "achieved", "proud" and "good situation". In contrast to Gabriella and Antonella, the negativity in the parents' attitude is not portrayed as an aggressive hostility, but as a profound deception and worry.

In some cases, as we have seen earlier in Richard's narrative, the decision not to tell the parents is not accompanied by such a worry about their reaction or deception – but this remains the exception. Raffaele refers to his parents' attitude as something that is completely unknown to him:

Raffaele (Rome, 26)

My parents [...] don't know anything about me. They know nothing. I have absolutely no idea about how they might take such news. [...] I don't know. I can't know it because, as a matter of fact, we have never talked about homosexuality at home. Absolutely [not]. Never. Perhaps that's one reason why I haven't found the courage yet to talk about it, because then it's all my own problem.¹⁴

In this account, the complete absence of expectation seems to require "courage" to break such a silence: "we have never talked about homosexuality at home". The fact that his parents have never talked about it is described as a burden, in that he is left alone with the weight of the

¹³ Original: "Mes parents ne sont pas au courant pour moi. Je ne leur ai pas dit, parce qu'en fait ils ont des gros problèmes, eux, à régler de leur côté qu'ils n'ont toujours pas réglés, donc j'ai pas envie de moi leur faire assumer un souci de plus, parce que vu comme je t'ai dit, comme je vis dans une petite ville où c'est vraiment un truc qui est loin des esprits, qui est mal perçu, et j'ai pas envie ça leur mette un souci en plus de ce qu'ils ont déjà. Donc je [ne] leur en ai pas parlé. Et vu que mon père me vois comme quelqu'un d'exceptionnel, quelqu'un qui a tout réussi dans sa vie, quelqu'un dont il est fier, je pense que oui, lui il me vois avec quelqu'un de très bien, avec une bonne situation, avec des enfants, avec une maison, il me voit, euh, le pauvre, quand je vais lui dire ce qui se passe dans ma vie, il va tomber de haut quoi."

¹⁴ Original: "I miei genitori [...] non sanno nulla di me. Non sanno niente. E non so minimamente come possano prendere una notizia così. [...] Non lo so, non posso saperlo, appunto perché di omosessualità in casa mia non se

"problem": "it's all my own problem." He thereby gives it a slightly different connotation compared to Garbiella's formula ("my own business").

"They know about me"

As we have seen in the table above, just about half of the respondents overall are "openly" lesbian or gay to their parents – even though the largest numbers of respondents in Berlin and London fall into this category. Such a category however can imply very different ways in which this is lived. Most importantly, "openness" can be lived either as a conflict or as an integration of lesbian and gay identities into the parental family life. Fabienne for instance, gives an account in which "it went extremely well":

Fabienne (Paris, 55)

In my environment it has always been very clear. I have always been very well accepted. [...] I've never had the misfortune of having to hide it, not in front of my family either. [...] From the start, I have been very lucky concerning my parents, [who were] very intelligent. [laughs] [...] I think that they were full of love, my parents, so they have tolerated that with a lot of grace. [...] Immediately, the first girlfriend that I had, I told them about. I asked my parents and talked to them. [laughs] [...] I was 23. [...] It went extremely well.¹⁵

She describes such openness as a coherent direct communication to her parents: "clear", "from the start", "immediately". Her parents' attitude is described both as "acceptance" and "toleration", and she attributes their behaviour as "intelligence", "full of love", and "gracious".

Many times, minor conflicts are described, that have been overcome, where partners have been presented and a good contact to the parents has been maintained. In some cases, however, "openness" is described as very problematic in a narrative of conflict. Mario for example, says that after he told his parents that he had a "boyfriend", there was a "very hard" crisis and he left his parents' home for a period of six months:

Mario (Rome, 25)

They know about me, [...] but they are very much against it. They are very closed-minded in this respect. Then they found themselves in front of – me. The thing was very hard. I stayed away from home for six months, but out of my own choice. They didn't accept that thing. [...] [That was] two years ago, I was twenty. [...] The conflict had [...] come up because I had lied to

ne mai parlato. Assolutamente. Mai. – Forse è anche per questo che non ho trovato ancora il coraggio di parlarne, perché poi è tutto un problema mio."

¹⁵ Original: "Dans mon environnement ça a toujours été très clair. J'ai toujours été acceptée tout à fait bien. [...] J'ai jamais eu le malheur de devoir le cacher, ni au niveau de la famille. [...] J'ai eu beaucoup de chance dès le départ avec mes parents, très intelligents. [rire] [...] Je pense qu'ils ont été plein d'amour mes parents, donc, ils ont toléré ça avec beaucoup, beaucoup de grâce. [...] Tout de suite, la première amie que j'ai eue, j'en ai parlé. J'ai convoqué mes parents et je leur ai parlé. [Petit rire] [...] J'avais vingt-trois ans. [...] Ça s'est extrêmement bien passé."

them. [...] I had [...] gone to Bologna for two days to sign up with Arcigay [Italian lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender association] in order not to have to do the military. And I hadn't told them. Then they had found [...] that piece of paper [...]. [Then], one day, it happened that my boyfriend came to my house, and there had been a discussion with my mum. [...] I get back home in the evening, [and] there is my father, my mother, my brother, all sitting there at the table talking badly, well, why? "Who is that one that you brought to the house?" "Where did you meet him?" [...] "Who is he?" I told them: "Look," [laughs] "we are together." My father like this: "You do what?" "We are together." – "Ah!" And then, they stayed like that for a moment, you see, "But you are...?" And I [replied]: "Eh! Yes."

FJ: [laughs]

F: "It happens." I always told them that I was bisexual, to keep the thing somehow calm. If I told them I was gay, they would really kill themselves, because my parents are really against that. At least before, they were totally [laughs] against that thing. Now, already, slowly slowly, you know. [...] According to my mum it was an illness when someone [was gay]. The discourse of the gay illness: "You are ill!" [laughs] [...] So she said at the beginning. Now she is upset about it. I mean, I never talk to her about it in terms of my boyfriend. My mother still hopes that one day I could come back home with a woman. [...] Every now and then I try to tell her: "No, I have a boyfriend." She [then says]: "Ah, you call that a boyfriend? Call him a friend." "Well, ok, I will call him a friend if you want, if you prefer it that way I'll call him a friend. But then don't get on my nerves telling me: 'tell me everything!'" [...] I don't get along very well with my parents, but as a consequence, every time they are trying to talk to me, I always avoid it in all possible ways.¹⁶

Quite often, such a conflict, often less radical than in Mario's case, is described as an initial crisis that had thereafter been overcome. Many, particularly younger respondents, do not consider, at least in the long-run, an alternative to being "out" to their parents. Daniel for example, in speaking of being *out* to one's family, sees it as the only option, and argues that potential problems would generally be overcome:

¹⁶ Original: "M: Sanno di me, relativamente sanno di me. Però, sono molto contrari. Sotto quel aspetto sono molto chiusi. Poi, si sono trovati di fronte a me. La cosa è stata molto dura. Sono stato fuori casa per sei mesi, ma per scelta mia. Loro non accettavano questa cosa, [...] due anni fa. Avevo venti anni. [...] Il conflitto è [...] nato dal fatto che avevo mentito a loro [...] ero [...] andato su a Bologna per due giorni per farmi l'iscrizione all'arcigay per potere non fare il militare. E a loro non l'avevo detto. Poi hanno trovato [...] 'sto foglio. [...] Era successo che un giorno era venuto il mio ragazzo a casa, è c'era stata una discussione con mia madre. [...] io ritorno la sera, che era mio padre, mia madre mio fratello, seduti a tavola, a velenare insomma: 'Ma perché? Chi è questo che te c'hai portato a casa?' [...] Ma chi è questo, ma perché? Ma dove l'hai conosciuto? [...] Ma chi è lui?' Io gli ho fatto: 'Guarda,' [ride], 'ci stiamo insieme.' [ride] Mio padre così: 'Che ci fai?' – 'Stiamo insieme.' – 'Ah!' – E poi lì, sono rimasti un attimo così loro, vedi, ma tu sei? E io, [affirmativo:] eh eh! Sì. - FJ: [ride] - M: Succede. Io a loro ho sempre detto che ero bisessuale, per mantenere un po' calma la cosa, gli dissi proprio che sei gay, si ammazzano, si amazzano proprio, perché, i miei sono totalmente contrari a questa. Almeno prima erano totalmente [ridendo:] contrari di questa cosa. Adesso già, piano piano, sai [...]. Si trattava di una malattia secondo mia madre, un discorso della malattia gay, tu sei malato. [ride] [...] Lei diceva all'inizio. Adesso, gli fa fastidio, cioè, io non ci parlo mai, al livello del mio ragazzo. Mia madre spera sempre che un giorno io gli possa entrare dentro casa con una donna. [...] Ogni tanto provo a dirgli, no, esco con il mio ragazzo. Lei fa ah, si chiama ragazzo, chiamalo amico. Eh va be', te lo chiamo amico, se vuoi, se ti piace così, io lo chiamo amico, ma poi non rompere le scatole che dici: 'dimmi tutto quanto!' [...] Con i miei non ho un bellissimo rapporto, però di conseguenza, ogni volta cercano di volermi parlare, io evito sempre in tutte le maniere possibili."

Daniel (Berlin, 25)

You just have to make them change their ideas about it and tell them, ok, that doesn't work, and that's the way it is. Parental love won't suffer then, at least I don't think it will.¹⁷

In his view, being openly gay or lesbian has become more frequent. His discourse links the question of coming out closely with the often encountered narrative of progress, arguing that homosexuality has become far more accepted today than in the past. Daniel notes both that many more are publicly gay today than before and that they "come out" at a younger age:

Daniel (Berlin, 25)

FJ: Are there specific reasons why some people you know have changed their views?

D: Yes, because many more people have come out I think. That's my feeling. It has become a greater number, simply because they were encouraged by developments that have taken place. [...] I'd say you also notice it in that people who come out are getting younger and younger.¹⁸

Daniel links the view of society at large with both the proportion of those who live their sexuality openly, and with the age at which they have their "coming out".

A conflict with the parents, such as in Mario's narrative, of course does not need to be linked to homosexuality in the first place. Nadine gives a similar description of her parents ("no understanding at all", "überhaupt kein Verständnis"). But as she puts it here, she sees her parents' non-acceptance as a larger rejection of her "as a person":

Nadine (Berlin, 41)

I don't have any contact with my [...] mother [...]; my father isn't [alive] anymore anyway. [...] There are no [...] comments about how I lead my life and so on. [...] I have never made a big secret of it. When I had my coming out or when I then simply, yes, just loved women, I let them know and also demonstrated it to them in the end. There were no comments. Only later, of course - very mean. And then the contact was broken off in the end, and as I said, in fact there is no one now who would tell me how I should live, apart from myself, or then my partner. [laughs] [...] To come back on that, concerning my family, of course I don't find it nice that there has been such a radical break. But it isn't possible. It isn't possible. And why should I continue to deal with someone who is only hurting me and who shows no understanding at all? You know, no, or little acceptance. I think that it is [not only] linked to how I am living my sexuality, but more generally to me as a person [accentuated:] *as such*. It's a deep question. And yes, why should I continue to deal with that? [...] It was simply an extreme anti-position, [...] where I really rejected things, perhaps without much reflection: some things such as having a regular job [laughs], very profanely, or the value horizons. [There] I have to quote my father, well, for him it was duty before pleasure, and I wanted to turn it around. I still see it that way.¹⁹

¹⁷ Original: "Das muss man denen einfach dann austreiben, einfach sagen, ok, das geht nicht, und das ist halt so und dann. Die Liebe wird dann nicht darunter leiden zu den Eltern, denk ich nicht."

¹⁸ Original: "FJ: Gibt es bestimmte Gründe weshalb mache Leute, die du auch kennst, ihre Sicht geändert haben? D: Ja, weil sich viel mehr Leute geoutet haben, denk ich, ne. So hab ich das Gefühl. Das ist einfach eine größere Zahl geworden. Ähm, einfach dadurch, dass sie ermutigt wurden, durch ne Entwicklung, die sich vollzogen hat. [...] Man merkt das auch vielleicht auch, vielleicht noch dazu, man merkt das auch, dass die Leute, die sich, die ihr coming out haben, immer jünger werden."

¹⁹ Original: "Ich hab mit meinen Eltern beziehungsweise es lebt nur noch meine Mutter, - mein Vater eh nicht mehr, keinen Kontakt mehr und von daher gibt es auch keine[n] [...] Kommentar, wie ich denn jetzt so letztlich lebe, [...] ich hab da auch kein großes Geheimnis dann draus gemacht, als ich sozusagen das coming out hatte"

What Nadine's account shows is that the question of conflict and acceptance within the family is a normative one that cannot necessarily be boiled down to the question of accepting homosexuality – various other conflicts can come into play and implicitly or explicitly affect the degree of communication and acceptance. Nadine's rejection of materialist work ethics in this case seems to have created an unbridgeable generational gulf: "a radical break". Her lesbian identity thereby forms one element of a range of normative choice in Nadine's life plans, and figures as one of those which are viewed negatively by her parents. The way in which she portrays her generational conflicts helps focus on a range of normative questions rather than on sexual orientation per se. Concerning sexual orientation, yet again, it can be the way that it is lived (e.g. publicly or not, with a stable partner or not) rather than the dualism heterosexuality-homosexuality that can be contentious in such a conflict.

Thus, beyond being "out" or not, different normative expectations and levels of communication in the intergenerational relation to parents play a role in defining how, in this context, identities are expressed. In the next section, in a similarly exemplified way, lesbian and gay identities at the workplace will be reviewed.

5.1.3. At the workplace

Depending on the sector of employment, the workplace traditionally represents a challenging setting for gay and lesbian identities. Whether a woman or a man wants to present her- or himself as lesbian or gay, or whether to keep it a secret, often depends on the risks that it potentially poses to their career. Here again, we can distinguish between openness or not on the one hand, and between high acceptance and hostility on the other. In contrast to the parental question reviewed above, it seems however that concerning work situations, conflicts have never been experienced personally by any of the respondents. Instead, a perceived

oder einfach, ja, - dann doch Frauen liebte, dann das hab ich denen irgendwann mal – mitgeteilt und auch demonstriert dann letztendlich. Da gabs keinen Kommentar dazu, irgendwann später noch mal, natürlich ähm, sehr gemein. Und dann wurde auch der Kontakt letztendlich abgebrochen und wie gesagt so, im Grunde gibt's jetzt niemand der mir erzählt, wie ich zu leben habe, außer ich selbst, oder eben – meine Partnerin [lacht kurz]. [...] Schön find ich das abschließend zu meiner Familie natürlich nicht. Das es so ein radikaler Bruch ist. Andererseits, - es ist nicht möglich, es ist nicht möglich, und warum soll ich mich weiterhin mit jemandem beschäftigen, der nur verletzend ist und überhaupt kein Verständnis hat, ne. Keine, sag ich, wenig Akzeptanz. Ich denke das hängt jetzt [nicht nur] damit zusammen, wie ich meine Sexualität, wie ich das lebe, sondern überhaupt mit meiner Person [accentuated:] *an sich*. Das ist ne Grund ähm Tief Angelegenheit. Und ja, was soll ich da weiter mich auseinandersetzen. [...] Das war einfach so die extreme Antihaltung [...] wo ich einfach wirklich so richtig Sachen -- vielleicht auch unreflektiert abgelehnt habe manche Sachen, Regelmäßiges arbeiten gehen [lacht] ganz profan, ne. Oder diese Wertvorstellungen. [Da] muss ich meinen Vater zitieren, also für ihn war erst die Pflicht und dann das Vergnügen, und ich wollt's halt gern umdrehen, ne. Das find ich heute nach wie vor so."

hostility has always led to a strategy according to which a lesbian or gay identity was either not disclosed, or discussed only with a selected number of colleagues. Overall, a similar proportion as concerning the parents are openly lesbian or gay at their workplace: approximately half.

In many cases, respondents spoke of a high degree of acceptance and of a complete openness at the workplace. Andreas for example, who works in government, encounters a high degree of acceptance; he tells of his straight colleagues coming along to the gay parade:

Andreas (Berlin, 28)

A: Let's say that I went to the CSD²⁰ with my colleagues last weekend. They simply came along.

FJ: Also if they are not themselves gay you mean?

A: Correct.

FJ: So, no problem at all?

A: Not at all. [...] In Berlin by now that really isn't a problem at all. Most gays are unhappy that they are the only gay one at their workplace or that they have only one other gay colleague or things like that, but that's it.²¹

Andreas generalizes his account of unproblematic openness at work to Berlin on the whole. The example he uses to underline the degree of acceptance among his (heterosexual) colleagues is the fact that they "come along" to the Berlin Gay parade, which indicates an uninhibited attitude towards "gayness" as such. In describing such openness as an unproblematic integration of personal life and work relations, others explain how they would talk about their partner, or presenting him/her to colleagues, such as Miguel for example:

Miguel (London, 21)

I studied lab technician. [...] I'm working as a P.A., you know, at university. [...] I didn't tell them since the beginning because I wanted them first to know me like a person, and then to know that I'm gay. I've been working there since December and I told them in July. I told them that I'm gay. I mean, I didn't tell them: [exaggerated voice:] Hallo I'm gay! – It's just, we were talking, and they said: "Oh, why are you going that often to Germany" or whatever. "Because my boyfriend lives there." – "So, you are gay? I didn't know." Blablablah. So then you start a conversation [with] almost everybody at work. And I work in a university, which is quite a big building. Not everybody, obviously, I don't talk to everybody everyday, but yeah, lots of them know that I have a boyfriend, I'm gonna go to live in Berlin with him.

FJ: And so it was not a problem with anyone in – say ...

A: Nobody. – Yeah. My manager, once we were talking, and, apparently the gossip during one dinner at work was my apparent gay relationship. And the day after I said, what do you want me to say? That I have a boyfriend in Germany? I just said: "Yes. – Ok it's fine, I have a boyfriend." – "Then why haven't you told me?" And I said, "because I didn't find I had to tell

²⁰ *Christopher-Street-Day*, gay parade.

²¹ Original: "A: Sagen wir's so, ich war mit den Kollegen am Wochenende beim CSD. Die kommen dann schon mit. - FJ: Also auch wenn sie selbst nicht schwul sind? - A: Richtig. - FJ: Überhaupt kein Problem? A: Überhaupt nicht. [...] In Berlin ist das ja mittlerweile – überhaupt gar kein Problem. Die meisten bedauern, dass sie die einzigen Schwulen in der Firma sind, oder vielleicht maximal noch einen Kollegen haben oder so, aber nicht – das es nicht mehr sind bedauern die meisten eigentlich."

everybody that I'm gay." [...] They met [Felix], my boyfriend. They met him, and they really liked him, and, everybody liked him. He's very nice.

Miguel's very detailed narrative hints at various elements that will be analyzed later on in this chapter. He says that he "first [wanted his colleagues] to know [him] like a person", thus indicating that a public gay identity might obscure rather than clarify his own identity and personality. In the conversation with his manager, two different social norms appear as to public gay identities: one, according to Miguel, in which there was no need to mention his sexual orientation ("I didn't find I had to tell"), and another one, reportedly his manager's view, that his sexual orientation would normally be communicated at the workplace, unless there were specific reasons not to do so ("Why haven't you told me?").

Some of the descriptions of attitudes at work are clearly generational: the younger ones are more out, and (straight) younger colleagues more frequently challenge the "coming out" of other employees. Julien for instance, working in electronics, says that most of his colleagues know and that the relationship to them developed better than he expected on this account:

Julien (Paris, 29)

Six or seven colleagues know. With them it is going marvellously well. I even tell them almost in detail about my weekends. Before, it was a bit myself who had judged them, I thought it wouldn't go well. Those are one man and five women, all straights. My superiors? No, not them, they don't know. With them it would change something. It wouldn't necessarily go badly, but I think they would be uncomfortable. There are [nevertheless] still cheap jokes about gays, whereas, if they knew they would perhaps feel bad, and they would be more careful. I see that with those who know. They are more careful about what they say concerning that and feel uncomfortable when there are this kind of jokes.²²

Julien thus gives a picture of a work setting in which his sexual orientation has become a commonly accepted fact among colleagues. At the same time, in Julien's discourse, we can discern those to whom he talks, "in detail" about his gay identity, "six or seven colleagues", and those who "don't know". As we can see, the fact that caution persists towards his superiors as based on the presence of "cheap jokes" ("des blagues à deux balles") indicates a careful approach that has only been overcome with the colleagues of his generation who are at the same level as he is.

²² Original: "Six ou sept collègues sont au courant. Avec eux, ça se passe merveilleusement bien, je leur raconte même presque en détail mes week-ends. Avant, c'était un peu moi qui les avais jugés, je pensais que ça ne passait pas. Ceux-là sont un homme et cinq femmes, tous hétéros. Les supérieurs ? Non, eux non, ils ne sont pas au courant. Avec eux ça changerait quelque chose. Ce ne se passerait pas forcément mal, mais je pense qu'ils seraient mal à l'aise. Il y a [quand même] toujours des blagues à deux balles sur les homos, alors s'ils savaient ils se sentiraient peut-être mal, et ils feraient plus attention. Je vois ça avec ceux qui sont au courant, ils font plus attention à ce qu'ils disent à ce propos et se sentent mal à l'aise quand il y a ce genre de blagues."

In many cases, however, such observations cannot be linked to social change over time. Often, by contrast, differences in acceptance are associated with specific sectors. Olivier for instance refers to his work sector, stage theatre, as a milieu in which homosexuality has always been accepted:

Olivier (Paris, 39)

Absolutely. – Be it with gay or straight colleagues by the way. [...] It has always been a milieu where it was very, very, very accepted. [...] In the art scene or particularly for actors or stage professionals. It's not a problem! It's [...] rather those who refuse it who are a problem.²³

Olivier insists on the acceptance in his milieu with his formulation "very, very, very accepted" ("très très très accepté") and sees the stigma attached to the intolerant ones, as the last sentence should be understood, who for him "are a problem" ("sont un problème"). As he says, the "artists' milieu" more generally speaking is traditionally known both for a high proportion of homosexuals within it, but perhaps more importantly, a milieu in which divergence from societal sexual norms is far more easily openly expressed. Kevin draws a similar picture of the "arts environment", underlining that "sixty percent of the male workforce are homosexual":

Kevin (London, 32)

I mean most of my work colleagues have met my partner. – I work in an environment anyway, I work for the arts, so, I work in an arts environment where I would say probably sixty percent of the male workforce are homosexual, are gay. [...] It isn't really an issue at work. You, I can be who I want to be. [...] It's not an issue. And if I had an issue with my partner, I would quite, be quite happy to talk in confidence also at work.

Other work milieus, as the discourses encountered here confirm, on the contrary, are attached with the opposite reputation of being "homophobic". Jason for example coins "City" jobs, in the London finance sector, as "very homophobic":

Jason (London, 47)

FJ: Do you talk about your private life, would for instance colleagues or superiors know whether you have a relationship or not et cetera ...

J: No no. No. Certainly not at the moment. A lot of my colleagues at work have only ever known me as a married man. I work in the city, which is very homophobic. So I prefer to keep my current situation private. There are one or two people that I work with, that I've known for a very long time, and I've told them because, as friends, I think it's important that they know who they're having a friendship with. But other people at work, no, it's not important that they should know it.

FJ: Do they know for example that you're not together with your wife anymore?

J: Yeah, they know that I'm going through a divorce, yes.

FJ: You said that the City is very homophobic, how would you describe that, or what do you mean by that?

²³ Original: "Tout à fait. – Entre collègues homos ou hétéros d'ailleurs. [...] Ça a toujours été un milieu où c'était très, très, très accepté. [...] Dans le milieu artistique ou particulièrement des comédiens ou des métiers de la scène, c'est pas un problème ! C'est [...] plutôt ceux qui refusent ça qui sont un problème."

J: Well you know, financial institutions, investment banks, are a very macho kind of culture. And of course that's not compatible with being gay. Although in fact, I know many people who work in the city who are in fact gay. Many of them hide it. I think attitudes are sort of liberalising, I have heard that some of the large banks now have gay and lesbian social clubs et cetera, and it's ok to be openly gay in the workplace. You know, it's not important, it's just like another aspect of somebody's personality. But I think some people still would find it difficult to come out in that kind of environment.

Others refer to their work environment as being very heterosexual, and thus making the idea of being openly lesbian or gay more difficult. Julia refers to the IT sector as "a male dominated industry" and "a very straight industry":

Julia (London, 36)

FJ: For example your colleagues know about say, your private life, if you have a relationship?

J: No no.

FJ: Or is that something that is not talked about?

J: Yeah at work, I have been quite out where I've worked previously for a long time. I tend to take my time about whom I tell. I think most people are the same. You find out whom you can trust, whom you think you can trust, who [you] think is worth telling. And when you feel the time is ripe you tell them. And it's normally when you're in a social situation with work colleagues, and [...] they may ask you about your personal life. But I do work in a male dominated industry. And they don't tend to talk about their private live very much - unless it's to make fun of their wives or girlfriends. And, yes, it's a very straight industry, extremely straight. I don't know of any other gay people where I'm working now, which does make it harder. - Now. But I don't have a problem coming out - as long as I trust the people that I work with. Yeah. So, that's fine. But we tend not to talk about it and I tend, I must admit, I tend not to introduce the subject. But then I do feel that it's actually none of their business when I'm a professional colleague. And I don't really socialise a great deal with people from work anyway. And because I commute to work there is that additional thing where you tend to not want to go out after work to socialise because you have to get home.

Here, the IT sector is thus not that much considered as a homophobic environment, as Jason had characterized the bank and financial sector of the London City. Instead, she describes it mainly as "straight", thus marking the absence of other homosexuals rather than a discriminatory attitude, and as male, as indeed the science and engineering sector on a broader scale.²⁴

Interestingly, her girlfriend Harriet, who is also working in IT (they had met through work), but in a different company, paints a very different picture:

Harriet (London 35)

FJ: What about at your work, do you speak with your colleagues, also with the superiors, your boss et cetera, about your personal life, whether you would have a relationship or not?

²⁴ Women's employment as scientists and engineers in the EU was at 28.1% for the EU-15 and 29.9% for the EU-25. Interestingly, the numbers for the UK, Germany and France are extremely similar, and at the lower end: 20.1%, 21.8% and 21.6% respectively, while Italy has 34% female employment for these professions. See: Eurostat. *Measuring gender differences among Europe's knowledge workers*. (Brussels 2006). Online version: http://epp.eurostat.ac.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-NS-06-012/EN/KS-NS-06-012-EN.PDF, p. 3

H: Yeah. It's something I'm comfortable about and my immediate colleagues will know that I'm going out with Julia. And they will have, you know, she's met one of them already, and it's something you would just talk about in normal conversations in which you talked about your domestic life or your plans for the week-end. So, so yeah, I'm quite open in the workplace.

FJ: [...] They basically react very comfortably with it?

H: Yes, yes, they do. And, - I work alongside a gay man, and it's, people of all different ages, jobs and everything like that, and no one bats an eyelid, and that's nice.

In Harriet's narrative, neither the sector nor the generation of colleagues has an impact on the level of acceptance: "people of all different ages, jobs and everything like that, and no one bats an eyelid." She characterizes her work environment as one in which her homosexuality is treated as "normal" ("met one of them already", "normal conversations"), as un-eventful ("no one bats an eyelid"), and explicitly values such a state of affairs as being "nice".

Yet again, a work environment can also be seen as largely homophobic despite a high number of homosexual colleagues, such as in Léa's case who talks about her lesbian colleagues in the police. In this longer extract, we can see how Léa's attitude at work connects with a desire to "be able to be out" (s'afficher) in a more general context. The passage also shows how the workplace triggers a long discourse within the interview situation, without necessarily being brought up by the interviewer:

Léa (Paris, 30)

L: There is a sense of being fed up with staying in places made especially for us. We too want to have a normal life, want to be out in public, anywhere, in a restaurant, whatever restaurant it is, at the cinema, in the bars, whatever bars they are, not necessarily with the rainbow flag in front of the bar. I'd like to, as everyone else, I think, lead a normal life. Not having to hide from the neighbours, from colleagues, from society in general. And that's something I don't yet manage to do, because there is too much intolerance around me. Especially at work. [The police] is after all a rather homophobic environment - a rather macho and racist environment. All in all, it's an environment of men, predominantly and it's difficult for new ideas to get into through to the rather closed-minded environment at the police.

FJ: So how is it concretely at work?

L: Well, at work, I choose whom to tell about it. I mean, I get to know the people better before telling them about my intimate life, about my life in a couple. And until now with all whom I have told about it went well. They've taken it well. But there are other people there whom I would never tell, because I hear them talk, because I know their reactions. [...] For me it's people who are not worth it. [...] You just have to hear them talk to know what their reactions are. It's really bad macho reactions: « Anyhow, if girls become lesbians it's because they've never had a real man, a real male who showed them » and so on. When you hear this sort of things you tell yourself that obviously the guy will not understand if an ok-looking girl prefers girls. [...] But for the rest, with the people with whom I have talked about, it went really well, because, as I told you, I took my time before [telling them], to see what they thought about it. You know, they were people I had sounded out beforehand. So, obviously, I was not surprised by their reaction. [...] Out of [...] about twenty colleagues on my floor there are maybe five who know. [...] There were two homosexual women whom I told about it, so on the contrary, we got closer through that. [...] I knew [they were lesbian] because you could see it physically. [...] But well, they didn't know about me, because unless I say it, people don't know it. Then, with the men it went well because they had already been friends before, well, they were people I knew

already before. So I told them because it came up, and because, as they have become close [friends], we saw each other outside of work, so obviously, I ended up telling them because it is part of my life. [...] For one year, [there has also been an association at the police] [...] but [...] I was told only bad things about it. [...] It's just a pretext for a flirting. And for me I'm not interested in that kind of association, because in order to meet someone I go to bars, I don't go to associations.²⁵

Léa expresses the explicit desire to "be out" (s'afficher) throughout different social settings, of which she provides an enumeration: in restaurants, at the cinema, in bars ("not necessarily with a rainbow flag"), to neighbours, to colleagues at work, towards "society in general". A clear desire for such a publicly expressed homosexual identity faces the impossibility due to "far too much intolerance around [her]": "something I don't yet manage to do" ("un truc que [...] j'arrive pas encore à faire").

She describes her workplace, the Parisian police, as a "homophobic", "macho", and "racist" environment. This is contrasted by the presence of at least two lesbian colleagues among the small group that works on her floor, the existence of a lesbian and gay association (which she is rather suspicious about) and the accepting attitude of other colleagues whom she has talked to: "it went well" ("ça s'est bien passé"). In taking account of both her desire to "be out" and

²⁵ Original: "L: Il y a un ras le bol de rester dans des endroits spécialement faits pour nous. Nous aussi on a envie d'avoir une vie normale, de pouvoir s'afficher n'importe où, au resto, quel que soit le restaurant, au ciné, dans des bars, quels que soient les bars, pas forcément avec des drapeau arc-en-ciel devant le bar. Moi j'ai envie, comme tout le monde je pense de vivre comme tout le monde, de ne pas avoir à me cacher vis-à-vis de mes voisins, vis-à-vis de mes collègues, vis-à-vis de la société en général. Et c'est un truc que j'ai pas encore, que j'arrive pas encore à faire parce que je sens encore beaucoup trop d'intolérance autour de moi - notamment vis-à-vis de mon travail. [A la police] c'est un milieu quand même assez homophobe, un milieu assez macho, un milieu assez raciste. C'est un milieu d'hommes encore beaucoup. Donc c'est vrai que les idées ont du mal à rentrer dans ce milieu assez fermé de la police. Voilà. - FJ : Et donc ça se passe comment au travail ? - L: Ben au travail, moi je sais à qui je le dis. C'est-à-dire, j'apprends à connaître les gens avant de leur dire, avant de leur parler vraiment de ma vie intime, de ma vie de couple. Et pour l'instant tous les gens à qui je l'ai dit, ça c'est très bien passé. Ils l'ont très bien pris. Par contre il y a des gens à qui je sais que je ne le dirais jamais, parce que je les entends parler, parce que je connais leurs réactions, [...] et puis pour moi c'est pas des gens qui valent la peine. [...] Enfin, il faut les entendre parler [...], c'est des grosses réactions de machos: « Ah, de toute façon, si il y a des nanas qui deviennent lesbiennes, c'est parce qu'elles n'ont pas connu un vrai mâle, tu vois un vrai mec, qui leur a montré ce que c'était. », Enfin bon, quand t'entends des trucs comme ça, tu te dis que forcément, le gars va pas comprendre si la nana est plus ou moins potable qu'elle se tourne vers les nanas. [...] Mais sinon, avec les gens avec qui j'en ai parlé, ça c'est très bien passé. Parce que, je t'ai dit, j'ai pris le temps avant de voir ce qu'ils en pensaient, tu vois, c'est des gens que j'ai sondé un peu avant. Donc forcément, je n'ai pas été surprise de leur réaction. [...] Sur [...] une vingtaine de collègues à mon étage il y a peut-être cinq personnes qui sont au courant. [...] Il y avaient deux filles homosexuelles à qui je l'ai dit, donc au contraire ça nous a rapprochées. [...] Moi je le savais parce que ça se voyait physiquement. [...] Mais bon, elles, elles savaient pas pour moi, parce que moi je veux dire à moins que je le dise, on le sait pas quoi. Donc sinon avec les hommes, ça s'est bien passé parce que c'étaient des amis avant, enfin c'est des gens que je connaissais avant. Donc, je leur ai dit parce que c'est venu sur le tapis, et parce que comme ils sont devenus intimes, on se voyait hors travail, donc forcément, ben je suis venue à leur dire, parce que comme ça fait partie de ma vie. [...] [Il y a aussi une association dans la police] depuis un an [...] mais [...] en m'en a dit que du mal. [...] C'est uniquement un prétexte de lieu de rencontre. Et moi, une association comme ça m'intéresse pas quoi. Parce que pour rencontrer je vais dans les bars, je ne vais pas dans les associations." On the experience of imagined risk in the French context, see e.g. Luc Peillon's account of homosexuals working for the national railways SNCF: Luc Peillon, "Les gays salariés non déclarés," *Libération*,

her worry what the reactions there could be, we find that Léa carefully explores individual colleagues' attitudes. In her case, the fact that she only tells colleagues when she feels that "they have become intimate friends" is not the result of wanting to restrict her lesbian identities to the private sphere. Rather, it is the result of experiencing attitudes that make her worry and adopt a careful approach: "I will never tell them, [...] when you hear this sort of thing" ("je ne [leur] dirai jamais, [...] quand t'entends des trucs comme ça.") Léa's work-place exemplifies how several contradictions interact in the formation of a public identity: most importantly, Léa's outspoken desire to be "out" clashes with pragmatic option not to tell certain colleagues ("they are not worth it") – while no concrete threat is being identified if she were out: indeed, she says that two colleagues on her floor are lesbian, and seen as lesbian by others. Another subtle distinction in Léa's discourse is the classification of colleagues and friends. Colleagues are told about her identity when they are in fact friends and consequently no longer considered as colleagues ("they have become intimate [friends], we saw each other outside the work context"). It seems that despite the desire to "be out" "at work", Léa embraces the idea that unless a colleague becomes her friend, there is no need to talk about her homosexual identity. Implicitly, then, a distinction between private (friendships) and public (work relationships) seems to be upheld as an ideology rather than being a simple matter of "having to hide". The "public" and "private" spheres historically relate to the state on the one hand, and to the family on the other, with Civil Society constituting a new form of the "modern public sphere".²⁶ Its constitution, as Joan Landes argues, "meant that a whole range of concerns came to be labelled as private and treated as improper subjects for public debate."²⁷ Landes, as many feminist theorists, has related gender imbalances to this distinction in which women are regarded as traditionally bound to "private" concerns (child care, household). As we will see, an underlying argument throughout the analysis is related to how lesbian identity can, and indeed often does take advantage from the structural constitution of female privacy on the level of a personal strategy: we had seen such a case in Bianca's 17 year long relationship (4.4), where she had lived with her girlfriend in a town in Abruzzo without anyone questioning their friendship (and colleague) status – a situation unimaginable for two male homosexuals. But at the same time, this confinement to the private sphere precludes the political effect of the degree of visibility that gay male identities have enjoyed over the past decades: indeed, as we have seen, the public personalities who have been publicly "out" are

27/2/2006: Coming out is done on a case-to-case basis and remaining silence remains the attitude of most." (Original: "Les coming-out se font au cas par cas et le silence demeure l'attitude majoritaire.")

²⁶ Habermas in Joan B. Landes. "The Public and the Private Sphere: A feminist Reconsideration." Landes, ed. (1998). *Feminism, the Public and the Private*: 140

²⁷ Ibid: 142

mainly men. While these gender based distinctions are critically important for the discussion in this section, they will be approached through the individual narratives rather than on a structural level. Indeed, on the level of the narratives, in turn, male and female discourses on privacy and "being out" show various overlaps and similarities despite the gender context they tend to imply, particularly concerning working environments that had been the focus of this section.²⁸

In the following, the different elements that lie at the basis of how public identities are expressed will be spelled out further. Thus, in an analysis of identity management, the evaluation of risk and ideology of what identities respondents would like to live form the basis of how publicly open or private and secret lesbians are in a range of different social settings.

5.2. Managing Identity

As we have seen, many respondents live homosexual identities openly, both at work and in their families, the two examples considered in the analysis. However, working on the basis of Léa's and Jérôme's discourses, we can spell out a case-by-case evaluation which stands at the basis of the decision of when and to whom to disclose this information. This concerns both individual people (for example a specific colleague or family member) and social settings (for example "at work" or "in my hometown"). Gay or lesbian identities can be lived publicly in one setting and not in another, towards one person and not to another. Where specific social settings are addressed in this way, one can hence speak of a case-by-case management of identities.²⁹ In the perspective of identity management, one could therefore ask: What different identities (of the same person) are constructed in different social spheres in which she or he moves her- or himself? What constraints or normative frameworks do these identities (public, private or secret identities) reflect?

The way lesbians and gays choose to live their identity in each setting is often based on an experienced or imagined risk. As we have seen, a growing acceptance of homosexuality is noted by most respondents. But acceptance is not experienced throughout. For many, difficulties remain; even for those who consider themselves as generally "out", evaluations

²⁸ I am grateful to Donatella Della Porta, who has helped me in clarifying and developing my ideas on this through her comments and suggestions concerning the ideological level of identity management.

²⁹ On the management of stigma and identity, compare Goffman (1963), *Stigma*, chapter 2: "Information control and personal identity."

take place in certain public settings, such as in certain geographical locations (e.g. "in the suburbs"). Hostility in certain settings is indeed referred to in all four cities, even in Berlin where, as we had seen, the largest proportion of "open" respondents was recorded. As Katharina, who is 22, notes: "In large parts of society it is still not seen as normal when two women or two men are together. [...] It will last quite a while until it really gets through to all layers of society, I think." For Katharina, here, the intolerant sections of society will resist acceptance, at least for a while.

The social changes of the last decade or so have surely had a marked impact on how homosexual identities are managed within different social settings. But it would be a mistake to conclude that homogenous, open gay and lesbian identities are the result of those changes. Mostly, one cannot speak of *one* identity *as such*, but of the establishment of different identities according to the social context. This is not to say that homosexuality is characterised by double lives or schizophrenia. Instead, this observation reflects a general truth about *any* identity construction. "Identity management", between public, private and secret, is not specific to the study of homosexuality. It may however be particularly interesting in the case of homosexuality because of the impact of the social change which the field has undergone. Moreover, "identity management" may be particularly explicit and reflected in the question of how homosexual intimacy relates to public identity; this at least is what the vast diversity in the narratives on how identities are managed by the men and women encountered within this study suggests.

5.2.1. Case-by-Case Management

While public homosexual identities are not always problematic, mostly, possible difficulties and rejections and the long-term consequences of creating a gay or lesbian public identity are considered and weighed up. So what are these specific settings in which constraints on public identities are felt? For many respondents these constraints not infrequently manifest themselves through specific persons in their social environments, such as their parents or colleagues, as we have seen, or friends or yet more abstractly specific groups of society that are judged as being rather intolerant towards homosexuality. Hence, the observed general trend towards greater acceptance does not change the fact that for a number of respondents, managing homosexual identities remains the result of a subtle case-by-case judgment. In general terms, public identities can then be constructed according to experienced, expected or

imagined risks. We have seen in various examples how respondents point to the careful evaluation of such risks, such as in Gabriella's indirect investigation about her parents' attitude towards homosexuality, or in Léa's careful analysis of her police colleagues' views and opinions about lesbian women.

Such strategic evaluations are all but uncommon in the respondents' discourses, and apply to a variety of social settings. Antonella, for example, testifies to a long-term strategic position tailored around the necessities of her social environment at university:

Antonella (Rome, 24)

At work, at university, you cannot tell everyone. [...] At university, only one friend of mine knows about it. With all the others, I first tried to find out what their attitudes were. Seeing that many of them are really closed-minded, or even find it disgusting, you avoid it. You avoid it because you will have to continue your studies with those people, and then the specialization [in medicine]. People talk about it, and it's all a big village, so you avoid talking about it. Why? For what reason? It's already so difficult to continue with the studies, why should I also fight for that?³⁰

Many adapt to their social environment by forging a public identity suitable to it, thus "avoiding" potential problems, such as possible obstacles to a specific career plan in Antonella's case. While her discourse is much more oriented towards prioritizing the most beneficial solution, it bears very close similarities to Léa's where the "trying out" of attitudes is concerned. In other words, "openness" will only be adopted as a strategy if the possible result has been carefully examined in advance. And in this case, Antonella concludes such a "trying out" strategy by finding that her fellow students are mostly "closed-minded".

In some of the interviews, specific social settings such as the family, the workplace or specific cultural groups are singled out. In certain places, or among certain groups of people, some refrain from addressing their homosexuality. Daniel points to suburban areas in East Berlin (as mentioned above), and refers to adolescents, right-wingers and the elderly as potentially insulting gays in the street:

³⁰ Original: "Nel ambito lavorativo, all'università, non si può dire a tutti. [...] All'università, di tutti i miei ami lo sa soltanto una mia amica. Tutti gli altri, I ho cercato prima di vedere com'era l'approccio. E vedendo che molta gente è proprio chiusa, e anzi, fa quasi schifo questa cosa, eviti. Eviti perche tu con queste persone devi condividerci università, un domani la specializzazione. C'è un passaparole, anche perché poi è tutto un paese, e quindi uno evita. Perche per quale motivo? Già è così difficile andar' avanti all'università, per quale motivo devi lottare anche per questa cosa?"

Daniel (Berlin, 25)

Maybe sometimes you get some nasty comment or something like that, like from adolescent teenagers, right-wingers or so, who don't have any experience with it yet, none with their own lives either, or perhaps from the elderly, who still have the old scheme of things in their heads.³¹

Avoiding certain areas or certain groups of people may or may not be felt as a constraint, yet often the area or the group of people in the immediate vicinity has an impact on showing affection in public for instance, such as in Daniel's reference to "right-wingers". Abstract references to social groups can imply a careful approach to being *out* as much as personal experiences with specific people.

Social settings are thereby often described in a generalized manner, such as geographically, where the country's capital, large cities, and the "city centre" stand for open homosexual identities, while the "suburbs", "provincial towns" and "the countryside" are often quoted as settings in which it is "harder [...] to come out". Pragmatic risk avoidance as identity management clearly reflects various levels of potential risks. These can be based on negative experiences, attitudes expressed by specific people, imagined attitudes, taboos, or institutional risks – factors that are mostly interrelated.

Jenny for instance speaks of the generally private approach most gays and lesbian nurses have at her place of work, a Catholic hospital, as far as superiors are concerned. In such faith-run sectors of employment, one can speak of an institutional risk, as a commitment to a same-sex partnership for example can have as much direct impact as possibly being sacked on those grounds.³² Jenny reports of some employees "hiding" their homosexuality "very much":

Jenny (Berlin, 20)

Yes, I have to say I work in a Catholic hospital [laughs]. But among ourselves we know who is and who is not, and I have so far not had any problems. And many know, and there are no problems with the younger ones. Most of them are [gay or lesbian] themselves, and I have to say that some of them hide it very much. Of course, in a Catholic hospital, I won't go to the nun and say: Hello, I'm lesbian! Well, I don't do that. But I have had positive experiences in the hospital, no negative ones. But I wouldn't go on about it, honestly. Those who need to know, do know about it. But I don't wear a sign around my neck saying I'm lesbian.³³

³¹ Original: "Vielleicht kommt auch mal der ein oder andere böse Kommentar oder so, gerade so von pubertierenden [pubertären] Jugendlichen die dann so'n bisschen, mit Rechten oder so, die damit noch keine Erfahrungen haben, auch mit ihrem eigenen Leben nicht, oder vielleicht bei Älteren, die dann noch so das alte Schema haben."

³² The constraint imposed by the Catholic Church as an employer is all but fictional: the public registration of a same-sex partnership formally constitutes a reason for terminating the employment even in state-financed institutions if they are administered by the Catholic Church in Germany. This includes a vast number of schools, hospitals and charities. Constitutional Court judgment BVerfGE 70, 138.

³³ Original: "Ich muss sagen, ich bin in einem katholischen Krankenhaus [lachen beide]. Aber, äh, untereinander wissen wir halt wer ist wer nicht, und ich hab bisher keine Probleme gehabt. Und viele wissen das, und das gibt's keine Probleme von den jüngeren Leuten her. Die meisten sind selber und die verstecken sich auch teilweise sehr,

This passage shows that in this specific setting, for Jenny, a private and careful approach to her lesbian identity has implied “not having problems”. “I don’t wear a sign around my neck saying I’m lesbian” underlines the specific strategy employed here; Jenny has adapted to the collegial tradition within the hospital, to a norm of keeping the personal private, at least to a certain extent and regarding “the nun” in particular. An institutional risk relating to the Catholic church as an employer is accompanied by an imagined hostile attitude of the nun and a taboo environment that is created by those who “hide it very much”.

In the past, institutional risk was fundamental at the level of the illegal status of homosexual acts themselves, particularly so in the UK until as late as the 1970s. Compared with such scenarios, the compelling necessity of multiple identities and double lives seems to be the exception in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome today. But the concept of a case-by-case management of public identity is not absent from the interviews conducted here. As has been shown, this includes careful approaches to being publicly gay or lesbian with certain people, in certain institutions or in certain areas. Social identities still depend on social constraints and possibilities, and on values that the individual includes in his or her choices in constructing identity. Outright institutional necessities, such as the one referred to involving the Catholic hospital, are the exception. Imagined attitudes and cultural taboos, however, constitute a larger and vaguer notion of risk in the management of lesbian and gay identities.

5.2.2. Taboos and imagined risks

Often, the judgements on which such choices of identities rely in different social environments are determined by prejudices rather than actual experiences of who is likely to accept and who is not. In another passage, Jenny speaks of her reluctance to present herself as a lesbian to her Muslim friends:

Jenny (Berlin, 20)

Well, I have had positive experiences. And I think that at the end of the day, also my Muslim friends wouldn’t have a problem with it either, but I don’t really insist, because there’s always a bit the fear that, you know, that they would somehow distance themselves, I don’t know. Because I don’t know how they see it. I even have the suspicion that one friend of mine, she’s Muslim too, that she wouldn’t mind having a go herself, but I don’t really mention the subject, because she’s never had a relationship either with a man or with a woman. No idea, but

muss man sagen. Na klar, im katholischen Krankenhaus, so zu den Ordensschwestern geh ich auch nicht und sag hallo ich bin lesbisch, also, das mach ich nicht, ne. Aber, ich hab positive Erfahrungen im Krankenhaus gemacht, keine negativen, obwohl, ich würd’s da auch nicht breit trampeln. Ganz ehrlich. Es wissen die, die’s wissen auch müssen, die wissen’s halt, aber ich trag kein Schild ich bin lesbisch.”

somehow I also think that, I just have the feeling, I don't know why, but it's a feeling I have. And she doesn't, I think she wouldn't be able to cope with it.³⁴

Jenny acts according to her cultural assumptions; she assumes that the girl would have difficulties accepting her own homosexuality and refrains from addressing it, keeping her own lesbian identity as a private matter towards her friend. The cultural reference is clearly depicted in her reference to this friend and others as "my Muslim friends". Jenny's "fear" that "they would somehow distance themselves" thus illustrates this imagined risk. While she thinks that "at the end of the day [...] they wouldn't have a problem with it", her risk assessment is clearly linked to her repeated reference to religion.³⁵ Imagined risks concerning social groups of society can have a very concrete impact on personal everyday choices in managing identity. Jenny's narrative can serve as an example of how the abstract and the personal interact. Her "feeling" that "they would somehow distance themselves" illustrates this imagined risk: the lived social consensus on what can be said to whom, and how an identity can be constituted in relation to friends, family, work colleagues, are most often based on presumptions and unspoken expectations rather than on concrete clashes of opinions. To summarize, in the construction of homosexual identities we can distinguish between the main factors of experienced conflict and taboos on the one hand, and ideological and pragmatic choices on the other. In the discourses, a main element of differentiation consists in the extent to which the respondent feels actively in control of his or her identity management – whether the decision on how to live public identities can be related to factors of choice, such as in Antonella's account ("why should I also fight for that?"), or related to uncontrolled worries such as in Jenny's narrative ("always a bit the fear", "wouldn't be able to cope"). As this comparison shows, the line between the two is often very thin. This aspect will be developed further below in the analysis of ideological choices relating to public identities.

Owen's narrative provides a different example for how personal experiences and imagined risk interact, where he tells of his childhood memories of his hometown in Northern Ireland. In his narrative an "imagined" risk of being gay is based on seeing others being "badly bullied".

³⁴ Original: "Also ich hab positive Erfahrungen gemacht. Und ich denke auch im Endeffekt meine Moslem-freunde auch kein Problem damit, aber ich geh da nicht so sehr drauf ein, weil 'n bisschen Angst hat man doch schon, ne, dass sie sich dann irgendwie distanzieren und keine Ahnung. Weil ich weiß nicht, wie sie das so sehen. Ich vermute sogar, dass die eine Freundin von mir, die auch Moslem ist, selber nicht so abgeneigt ist, aber ich sprech sie darauf nicht so jetzt an, weil, die hatte noch nie ne Beziehung, weder mit 'nem Mann noch mit 'ner Frau, keine Ahnung, aber ich denke auch so, dass sie, ich hab's einfach so im Gefühl, ich weiß nicht warum, aber ich hab so n Gefühl. Und die kommt damit, würde damit glaube ich nicht klarkommen."

³⁵ On homosexuality and Muslims in Germany, see Bochow (2003), *Islam und Homosexualität*

Quite concretely, he refers to effeminate boys at school and of his fear to be treated in the same way:

Owen (London, 26)

O: At home I grew up, and sort of all, yeah, all the ideas that I had, it was basically ignorance about what it was to be gay, were sort of informed by prejudice on the one hand, prejudice in the home even, because my father is seventy-six now, and he's of a different, he's of a generation where queers are queers, and a pretty undesirable bunch of people. So I think, primarily in the home I would say that sort of fear was fed. And then in the wider community, there's quite a lot of machismo, and - although, I mean I'd, I saw people who were a bit effeminate at school get fairly badly bullied. Not terribly, but sort of. I can imagine that their lives weren't particularly pleasant at school.

FJ: What happened exactly?

O: Well just that, I mean, there was no physical abuse, but a lot of verbal abuse. [...] The one guy [...] got a terrible time. He was always quite flamboyant and always had quite a lot of attitude, and he was a very strong person. And he'd sort of, he would give as good as he got. So he got it all the time. [laughs] But that's school anyway, isn't it? I mean, if you've got a, big ears, you're gonna get that, and if you've got one leg longer than the other you're gonna get it at school.

FJ: [laughs]

O: School-children are pretty cruel. -So I grew up with a terrible fear of being gay and what it was to be gay. And it was only when I came to London that I was able to spend a year where I didn't really contact anybody from home, and [...] even when I came to London I was trying to convince myself that I was gonna meet a girl, 'cause we were always taught: "Oh, that it's a phase!" and I thought: "This is a long phase!" [laughs]

Owen thus provides an account in which his identity was forged in reaction to seeing others being "bullied" at school: "So I grew up with a terrible fear of being gay and what it was to be gay." Owen's story seems to combine the fear of exclusion (not wanting to be "bullied" at school) with a self-imposed taboo ("I was trying to convince myself"), in a discourse in which he seems to analyze his identity retrospectively as hidden at the time. While his fear was linked to real experiences in his social environment, he thereafter continues to give a much brighter picture of the possibilities of social acceptance and hence of construction of a gay public identity in his hometown. He goes on to speak of his being "surprised" about the extent to which people in his home town subsequently accepted his homosexuality:

Owen (London, 26)

O: And [when I later told friends at home about being gay] I was really quite surprised of how, actually quite liberal-minded and cool people were about it. I never had any sort of homophobic abuse on it. [...] I never would have imagined that they would be as cool as they were about it. And none of them bat an eyelid. I went back and [some friends from school] said: Ah, I hear you are a faggot then! [laughs]

FJ: So none of them means also your family?

O: My elder sister's a fashion journalist, so I knew she wasn't gonna care. And my other sister was, they're, just, they're smart people, [...] they've travelled and things like that. [...] [But] I felt like I should probably tell [my parents]. So I asked this cousin of my mother's. And she went off and thought about for like a week, and came back and said, yeah, I think you should tell them. So I went home and told them. And they were upset on the night, like my father went to the pub and my mum went out and started digging the garden.

FJ: [laughs]

O: [laughs] Which is a typical reaction whenever anything goes wrong in the family. Mum goes into the garden and starts weeding or something, and dad goes down to the pub.

His working class friends summing up the facts with “Ah, I hear you are a faggot then!” and his parents having the same “typical reaction whenever anything goes wrong in the family”, is roughly what he refers to in saying “I was really – quite surprised of how – actually quite liberal-minded and cool people were about it.” This could seem a slight contradiction, as we may see both reactions as insulting and/or conflictual. But the actual reactions of his friends and family, in Owen’s account, is a benign one with which he is overly content, as opposed to an imagined, abstract fear that had created a taboo. The construction of gay and lesbian identity most often responds to risks and restrictions within different social settings where homophobic reactions are feared. While these risks and discriminations should by no means be underestimated, one has to carefully distinguish between factual discrimination on the one hand, which can take physically and verbally violent forms (and much of what Owen’s story tells belongs into this category), and taboos and imagined risks on the other. Both are difficult to evaluate in relation to one another and are mostly intermingled. While Owen’s experience is not devoid of conflict, it seems that in his imagination, things had been far worse. In a reality check at adult age, his fears from the past appear to him as having grown out of all proportion. Furthermore, in his discourse about his childhood, he seems to support the idea that the risks of being viewed as “gay” were not countered by an identity management in the sense of evaluations as above, but rather as an internalized taboo (“trying to convince myself”). Discourses about identity construction in the past, and during puberty in particular, are a subject of study in themselves, and they should in our perspective not be taken as being on a par with the other evaluations which we have seen. But such an undoubtedly important psycho-social mechanism of internalized stigma, while not a central topic for the analysis, should by the same token not be left unmentioned, and, as in Owen’s case, is part of the construction of an autobiographical past of various interviewees.

5.2.3. Adapting biographies

The way in which gays and lesbians adapt to the different social environments goes two ways: not only can the public identity be tailored according to the environment, but also the environment itself can, at least to a certain extent, be manufactured. Breaking friendships,

founding other ones, moving to other cities or other countries and the choice of certain career paths in preference to others are expressions of this.³⁶

In the case of Anne for example, the choice of leaving the finance and business world of the City of London in order to opt for a new start as a medical student is linked to the greater acceptance of her lesbian life style.

Anne (London, 35)

A: Constantly, in your life, you are asked: Are you married? At my age it's: Do you have children? I mean when you are not married. [...] Now, I find it relatively easy to say I'm not, I'm gay. And, well, I've been accepted by my professors, colleagues, the other students of all ages. I really wasn't confronted at all with any-, well, but in my previous work environment it was far more difficult to say you were gay, actually virtually impossible. It was the City of London in its whole, well, as it is, where there are plenty of jokes about gays, about lesbians. I was working in an extremely masculine environment. In fact, I was one of the only girls in my team. So I had to confront all these jokes every day. So, well, I imagine in some work environments it's very easy to be gay. - In some jobs it may be better to be gay than straight. I have a friend, my friend in Paris, he works for Vuitton for example. [laughs]. - But in certain work environments it's clearly easier to be straight than gay I think. [...] And in fact, that's why I also decided to change my career, it's because, now that I'm in a gay relationship that I don't want to hide, and I don't really think that where I was working before, people would have accepted it. [...]

FJ: So it was also a reason to change your career you think?

A: It was not the main reason but it was a reason, yes.³⁷

As we have seen, different sectors of employment reflect lower or higher degrees of acceptance concerning openly lesbian or gay identities. In Anne's narrative, three types of work environments are distinguished: the financial/economic sector ("the City", "difficult", "virtually impossible", "plenty of jokes", "extremely masculine"), medical studies ("relatively easy", "accepted") and the fashion/design sector ("better to be gay than straight"). The latter category mirrors the depiction of the artistic work environment which Olivier described above. Different kinds of explanation can be given for a traditional affinity between "creative" careers

³⁶ Ibid: 27. See also e.g. Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*: 33-57

³⁷ Original: "A: Constamment dans votre vie c'est: Est-ce que vous êtes mariée? - bon, par mon âge: Est-ce que vous avez des enfants? - donc quand vous êtes pas mariée. [...] Maintenant [c'est] relativement facile, quand on est ici [comme étudiante en médecine], de dire: Non, je suis gay. Et j'ai été acceptée par mes professeurs, par mes paires, par les étudiants de tous âges. J'ai vraiment pas du tout, pas du tout été confronté à, - . Mais dans mon milieu professionnel précédent, c'était beaucoup, beaucoup plus difficile de dire que vous étiez gay. En fait quasiment impossible. C'était la city londonienne par excellence, où il y avait énormément, c'est vrai, de plaisanteries sur les gays, sur les lesbiennes. Moi je travaillais dans un milieu qui était extrêmement masculin. J'étais en faite une des seule filles dans mon équipe. Et donc j'avais à affronter ces plaisanteries, ces choses-là, tous les jours. Donc, j'imagine que dans certains milieux il est très facile d'être gay. Dans certains milieux il est peut-être mieux d'être gay que d'être straight. J'ai un ami, mon ami de Paris, travaille pour Vuitton par exemple, et [en riant :] c'est vrai que - mais dans certains milieux il est plus facile clairement d'être hétéro que d'être homosexuel je pense. [...] Et c'est d'ailleurs pour ça que j'ai décidé de faire aussi un changement de carrière, c'est parce que, - - maintenant que je suis dans une relation gay que je n'ai pas envie de cacher, je crois pas que le milieu dans lequel je travaillais avant aurait vraiment accepté. [...] - FJ : Donc c'était une raison de changement de carrière aussi tu penses? - A : C'était pas la raison principale mais c'était une raison oui."

and homosexuality.³⁸ However, we have seen that in work environments that are described as being “homophobic”, homosexuality is not rare, i.e. in the interviews, respondents refer to other employees “hiding” their homosexuality at work. What is interesting in Anne’s case is that she explicitly refers to the normative environment in the different careers as a reason to change from one to the other: “that’s why I also decided to change my career”. Her openly “gay relationship” (where gay refers to female homosexuality as well) is what, in her discourse, requires her, amongst other reasons, to tailor her biography accordingly: “I don’t want to hide.”

Another way in which biographies are adopted to the level of acceptance or hostility of homosexuality is that of migration. This can happen on the grounds of legal prosecution of homosexuality in some countries. However in this research, it was mainly (but not only) migration to a large city that was mentioned in the interviews. The fact that many lesbians and gays move to large cities has been referred to as the *flight to the city*.³⁹ As Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan note:

Migration from home has long brought opportunities for the development of non-heterosexual identities (Chauncey 1994; Weston 1995; Bech 1997; Cant 1997). ... A common story among many non-heterosexuals is that of moving to what can be termed the ‘queer city’ (Hall Carpenter Archives 1989a, 1989b; Cruikshank 1992; Bech 1997; Cant 1997; Weston 1991, 1995). For some this has meant a significant geographical move; for others it can imply a new engagement with different social spaces within the cities where they grew up.⁴⁰

Migration to the city is a phenomenon largely reflected in the sample of respondents in this study. Over half of the interviewees had moved to the respective capital cities, albeit for different reasons, yet the development of a gay and lesbian identity was not absent from their accounts and mostly appeared to be an element in such choices, where sometimes the need to hide a lesbian or gay identity in a provincial town was felt as a constraint, and the move to the city, by contrast, a liberation.⁴¹

The stories told about provincial towns and their reputation of intolerance towards homosexuality are however quite diverse. Sometimes, positive experiences are narrated regarding homosexual life in a provincial town (e.g. Richard tells of Bordeaux as being an

³⁸ The question to what extent there are specifically gay and lesbian career choices of course implies various aspects that are here not pursued any further, see e.g. D. Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*: 50-57

³⁹ Ibid: 33-41, “La fuite vers la ville.”

⁴⁰ Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), *Same-Sex Intimacies*, pp. 82f

⁴¹ A move to the city at sometime in adult life applied to 5 out of 11 respondents in Berlin, 11 out 12 respondents in London, 7 out of 10 in Paris, 6 out of 14 in Rome.

ideal setting for gay relationships). At other times, the negative depiction of "provincial life" did not relate to homosexuality, but to other aspects of it (e.g. Jens tells about the Danish countryside). The fact that a specific town was the home to the family was another implicit factor in certain cases.

The example of Southern Italian towns, from where four respondents had moved to Rome, provides a good example of explicitly stated constraints that could easily be overcome after the move to Rome. Patti for instance, when talking about her home city, Messina, refers to the impossibility of living gay and lesbian identities other than "hidden"⁴²:

Patti (Rome, 38)

FJ: Did you know someone in Messina who was living a story openly?

P: Their homosexuality? No, no one.

FJ: No one.

P: Always hidden. I mean there are many, but they are all hidden. It is difficult to find a person [who is open about it], maybe there are one or two, you can count them. There is one, however, who organizes gay parties. Oh well, he is well known, [he doesn't say it] but you see it. But in the end they all go there, [even if they don't admit] to being gay. They are all normal, I mean, normal in inverted commas, because anyway it's not abnormal to be it. But it's like that. Very hidden.⁴³

Patti's account includes a depiction of how homosexual identities would be lived in Messina. She says "there are many" but describes secrecy and the rejection of gay or lesbian identity as a description of themselves as the general norm, or as the need to appear as the same as everyone else: "They are all normal".

Bianca, who had lived her long lesbian relationship in a small town in Central Italy, where no one, not even friends, knew about it, provides a similar account to Patti, both regarding the situation in provincial Central Italy, and in Puglia, where she is originally from. In contrast to this, Rome is described as a city of "freedom", a notion that she links to the openness in living her lesbian identity:

Bianca (Roma, 43)

B: I feel very free here in Rome. I feel very much at ease. I mean I feel really free. Free to do, well, I'm not an exhibitionist. I mean, it's not that I do it because I want to do it. If in that

⁴² On homosexuality and geographic dimensions in Italy see also Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*: 189-196

⁴³ Original: "FJ: Hai conosciuto a Messina qualcuno che viveva apertamente una storia? - P: La loro omosessualità? No. Nessuno. - FJ: Nessuno. - P: Sempre nascoste. Cioè, sono parecchi, ma sono tutti nascosti. Difficile che tu trovi una persona, forse ce n'è una o due, si contano. C'è uno che comunque organizza feste gay. Eh va be', lui è risaputo, [non lo dice] ma si vede. Però, alla fine frequentano tutti, [anche se non amettono] di essere gay. Tutti sono normali. Cioè, normali tra virgolette, perché comunque non è anormale esserlo. Comunque è così. Molto nascosti."

moment I feel like holding hands, I hold hands. When I feel like giving a kiss, I give a kiss. I haven't had much trouble.

FJ: And here in Rome, in [your] work environment...

B: They know it.

FJ: They know it.

B: Yes yes.

FJ: And it's not, what, how have they reacted, what did they say?

B: Nothing.

FJ: Nothing.

B: Actually, sometimes they even joke about it, because I normally tell them my [unsuccessful love] stories and [they] say that I'm a bit silly, well, ok. [laughs]⁴⁴

Bianca insists on the feeling of freedom ("I feel very free"), and links this feeling discursively to the absent of constraints, or "problems" in her words: "I haven't had much trouble." In contrast to her earlier life in the province, Bianca has therefore constructed an identity that is openly lesbian (in the street, at work, with friends), which had before been impossible or unfeasible. It is such a dynamic and a differentiation between the "big city" and the provincial town that creates the underlying logic for such a "flight to the city" in tailoring biographies to fit openly gay and lesbian identities.

The impact of constraint on how identities are constructed has been reviewed from different angles. This had included an analysis of a range of social settings, but also biographical narratives on work choices and migration. Under the former, identities were often adapted to the constraints felt in a specific setting, whereas under the latter, the choice of environments was wholly subject to the feasibility of an openly homosexual identity. The notion of constraint has been considered in greater depth. Experienced and imagined risks as well as taboo situations have been spelled out. In the following, however, a different element that structures the management of public identities will be looked at, where the ideological decisions in the respondents' discourses will be considered on their own account, independently of the question of constraints.

5.2.4. Private lives and "secret gardens"

Hostile environments are not the only factor in identity management; ideological positions play an equally important role. As has been argued, don't-ask-don't-tell identities often reflect

⁴⁴ Original: "B: Mi sento molto libera qui a Roma. Mi sento molto al mio agio. Cioè mi sento proprio libera. Libera di fare, - certo, non sono un'esibizionista, eh. Cioè non è che lo faccio perche -. Mi va di farlo. Se sento in quel momento di dare la mano, do la mano. Se sento di dare un bacio, do un bacio. Non ho avuto grossi problemi. - FJ: E qui a Roma, nel ambito del lavoro? - B: Lo sanno. - FJ: Lo sanno. - B: Sì sì. - FJ: E non, cosa, come hanno reagito, cosa hanno detto? - B: Niente. - FJ: Niente. - B: Anzi, - a volte ci si scherza pure sopra, perche tanto racconto le mie storie, dice sempre che sono un po' una cogliona, va be'. [ride]"

social risks and the experience of intolerance as constraints. But at the same time, in constructing a public identity, the individual also embraces a certain ideology, choosing how he or she wants to live and be perceived, at work, by friends or in the family. The ideological position here includes the question of what is considered “private”, as opposed to “public”, i.e. communicated only to a methodically restricted set of people, in relation to a given environment. Certain topics, questions and aspects of personal and emotional life are defined as inappropriate in specific contexts. The “ideology” of the “private life” has been constitutive of the concept of the “double life” of gays and lesbians – publicly mainstream, privately homosexual – which George Chauncey describes in his study of early 20th century New York.⁴⁵ The combination of constraints and available space for homosexual life made the double life the most common element of gay identity:

The complexity of the city’s social and spatial organization made it possible for gay men to construct the multiple public identities necessary for them to participate in the gay world without losing the privileges of the straight: assuming one identity at work, another in leisure; one identity before biological kin, another with gay friends.⁴⁶

While comparatively, in Western Europe today, we surely live freer lives,⁴⁷ identities still depend on the social and legal constraints and possibilities, hence the values that the individuals perceive as being constituent of what choices they can make in constructing their public identity. The ideology of the “private life” is one that suits lesbians and gays where the risk of discrimination is high. However, while arrangements of homosexual identity management have often been regarded as deeply rooted in factual discrimination, they also need to be considered on their own account, independent of constraints.

Christophe’s discourse, which we considered in greater detail in chapter three, provides a good example for such an ideological choice driven by privacy concerns, where he combines it with a description of great acceptance and absence of constraints. In addition to what we have heard about his narrative in chapter 3, in the following summary passage, he also provides a useful metaphor for the notion of privacy: he describes his intimate life as his “secret garden” – to which neither colleagues nor parents should have access, despite his overall belief that no one would have a problem with his homosexuality:

⁴⁵ Chauncey (1994), *Gay New York*

⁴⁶ Ibid: 133f

⁴⁷ To explicit the context of Chauncey’s study, in 1903, for example, a New York visitor to a gay bath was sentenced to seven years state penitentiary. Ibid: 134f

Christophe (Paris, 39)

In the work environment I don't want to talk about my private life. I draw a clear line there. [...] With my family it's the same. Well, they're not stupid. Neither side asks about it. So, no question, no answer. [laughs] This being said, they have met my former boyfriend, they knew he was living with me, so, well, it didn't bother anyone. It doesn't bother anyone. [...] But it's not necessarily a taboo. [...] But, what I mean, it's my private life, they respect my private life. Even if they don't know, even if I haven't come out, they don't know, so they don't ask any questions. [...] If I told them [...], well, they are of a certain age, they are from a certain generation, but I think there would be a complete, complete tolerance, that's for sure. [...] No worries. But I haven't done it yet because it's my private life, so I keep my life private. I quite like to have my secret garden, as I often say.⁴⁸

Christophe insists on the attribute "private" and insists on the socially agreed institution of privacy this represents: "It's my private life, they respect my private life.", "It's my private life, so I keep my life private." The fact that Christophe refers to his "private life" also regarding his parents indicates the flexibility of the label itself: "private" here coincides with "secret", and a no-question-no-answer-fence is built around Christophe's "garden of intimacy". His identity can quite literally be referred to as don't-ask-don't-tell identity: "neither side asks about it. So, no question, no answer".⁴⁹

Similar to Christophe's account on privacy, Elena explains that she "keeps things apart", and uses the term private for things she would not talk about at her workplace, in education:

Elena (Rome, 31)

I have never said much about my private life, in the sense that I make a difference there, so work is work, the relationship to colleagues is of a certain kind, and with the superiors it is of a certain kind, and private life is something else. So I try not to mix the two things. [...] Only with one colleague [I spoke about it]. But the reason was different. I mean, this colleague in reality was a friend. In the sense that there, a different situation outside of work had come about. So we see each other outside work, and therefore I told him about it. With the others, perhaps if there were more friendship, different from the work environment, maybe I would tell them too. [...] [With that colleague, what had] happened was that at the time when I told him, he had split up with his girlfriend after having been together for ten years. And me, at the same time, I had split up with my ex-girlfriend. And so we met in this desperation, in inverted commas. [...] So it was beautiful because one evening, we had met and I told him, as a matter of fact, that I had just had the end of a story too. And I hadn't told him who it was or anything,

⁴⁸ Original: "Dans le milieu du professionnel, je n'ai pas envie de parler de ma vie privée quoi. Je fais la distinction des choses. [...] Ma famille c'est pareil aussi. Mais bon ils ne sont pas idiots, donc, bon, voilà quoi. Il n'y a pas de questions de part et d'autres. Donc, pas de question pas de réponse. [rire] Donc, voilà quoi. Ceci dit, ils ne sont pas idiots, donc ils connaissaient mon ancien partenaire, donc ils savaient qu'il habitait avec moi, donc voilà quoi. Et bon, ça gênait personne. [...] Mais ce n'est pas un sujet forcément tabou. [...] Mais, je veux dire, c'est ma vie privée, ils respectent ma vie privée. Même s'ils sont pas au courant, même si je n'ai jamais fait mon coming out, ils sont pas au courant, donc, je veux dire, ils se posent pas de questions. [...] Si j'avouais les choses, [...] bon, ils ont un certain âge, ils sont d'une certaine génération, donc, euh, mais je pense qu'il y aurait une totale, une totale tolérance, enfin c'est clair oui. [...] Pas de souci. Mais je ne l'ai pas encore fait parce que c'est ma vie privée, donc je garde ma vie privée quoi. J'aime bien avoir mon jardin secret comme je dis souvent."

⁴⁹ Broqua and de Busscher refer to "la logique du « don't ask, don't tell »", see Christophe Broqua and Pierre-Olivier de Brusscher. "La crise de la normalisation." Broqua, Lert and Souteyrand, eds (2003), *Homosexualités au temps du sida*. See p. 26.

and had directly shown him the photograph. So he saw the picture of that girl. [laughingly:] It was a beautiful scene. And he is very easy going.⁵⁰

In the first part of this extract, Elena structures her life in “work” and “private life”: “work is work [...] and private life is [private life]” (“il lavoro è il lavoro [...] e la vita private è [la vita privata].”) Such tautologies reinforce these categories as fixed: “I try not to mix the two things”. When a colleague is told about her relationship to a woman, the reason lies in the fact that she speaks to him not in his function as a colleague, but as a friend: “this colleague in reality was a friend.” Her attitude towards privacy, in contrast to Léa at the police for example, is characterized by her ideological structuring of the world into “work” and “privacy”. While Léa similarly had told “friends” who were also colleagues, Elena does not refer to risk or discrimination, but describes herself as the *generator* of this distinction: “I make a difference there.”

5.2.5. Public or Secret Identities: conflicting views on choice and freedom

As we have seen, private or secret identities can be accompanied by a discourse of choice, as in Christophe's image of his “private garden”: secrecy and privacy can be embraced as positive elements of identity construction as much as openness and being public. While such a distinction is easy to make on the discursive level, it can be interpreted quite differently. The public-private distinction may well be seen as a constraining norm that is socially imposed – and based on constraint rather than norm. Yet, Elena and Richard embrace this norm and discursively present it as a choice, while Léa says that she wants “to be out everywhere” (“envie de s’afficher n’importe où”) which she had not “yet managed to do” (“n’arrive pas à faire”).

The question of what can and what cannot be a fully autonomous “choice” is a contentious one. Unlike in Richard’s and Elena’s case, both discourses are often combined, telling of intolerant

⁵⁰ Quote in original: “Io non ho mai raccontato più di tanto rispetto alla mia vita privata. Nel senso che separo le cose, allora il lavoro è il lavoro, il rapporto con i colleghi di un certo tipo, e con i superiori è di certo tipo e la vita privata è altro. Quindi cerco di non mischiare le due cose. [...] Solamente con un collega [ne ho parlato]. Però il motivo è stato diverso. Cioè questo collega era in realtà un amico. Cioè, si è creata una situazione diversa, al di fuori del lavoro. Quindi ci frequentiamo oltre al lavoro, e per questo ne ho parlato con lui. Con gli altri, forse se ci fosse un’amicizia maggiore diversa dall’ambito lavorativo, magari lo direi anche a loro. [...] E, è successo che, in, nel momento in cui glielo detto, lui si era lasciato con la sua compagna dopo dieci anni di fidanzamento. E io, nello stesso periodo, mi ero lasciata con la mia compagna. E quindi ci siamo ritrovati un po’ nella tra virgolette disperazione. Lui lasciato, io lasciata, [ride], e ci siamo un po’ ancorati, no? Quindi è stato bellissimo perché, una sera ci siamo visti, e io gli ho raccontato che appunto anche io avevo finito una storia. E non gli avevo detto chi fosse, niente, e gli ho direttamente fatto vedere la foto. Quindi ha visto la foto di questa ragazza. [ridendo:] E’ stata una scena bellissima. E lui è molto tranquillo.”

social settings on the one hand, and of willingly choosing to keep homosexuality a secret or private matter on the other. This will be illustrated in the following section, where a more detailed example shows the link between choice and constraint. It also illustrates the socio-geographical difference between Berlin and a provincial town close to Berlin.

In the interview with Petra and Monika, the alternatives become apparent of an openly lesbian life on the one hand, and a secret, hidden one on the other. Different elements are relevant to their choices. Petra and Monika are sisters, 38 and 42 years old. Both grew up in East Germany, in a small village in Brandenburg, a region bordering on Berlin. While both initially got married, two marriages from which they each have a child, Monika very soon fell in love with a woman. She caused a big scandal in her town and her family, and left her husband and child - being socially if not formally denied the right to keep her son - to live in (the then) East Berlin. There, she had several lesbian long term relationships. With her current girlfriend, she is planning to move to a village in the North-West of Germany to live in a house in the countryside.

Petra eventually divorced from her husband, kept the custody of her daughter and later had an amorous relationship with a younger woman who also had a boyfriend at the same time. Petra describes herself as bisexual. Only a very restricted number of people know about her lesbian relationship, and she encourages her daughter to keep it a secret even from her closest friends. Her public identity is primarily that of a divorced mother, an identity she judges as the most suitable for herself and for her daughter in the small town where they live. She describes the town environment as generally "conservative" in an oppressive way.

Petra (Berlin, 42)

Oh well, I know what those children are like. And I also know what kind of opinions are about, from the parents' reunions and also from what the children say. Well, then you can just about estimate how conservative some things turn out to be. And then I just tell myself, they don't need to know. Then it's better to keep the silence. Well, you don't have to [talk about it].⁵¹

Petra's relationship is fundamentally based on secrecy. It is, however, a secrecy she embraces as her own choice after all. In the following passage, Petra's and Monika's respective work environments serve as an example for their identity construction. Both are working as a

⁵¹ Original: "Also so, man kennt ja so die Kinder, ne, und man kennt ja auch so, durch Elternversammlung oder so auch, oder auch von den Kinder, so die Meinungen, die da sind, ne. Also da kann man dann schon einschätzen, wie konservativ so manche Dinge rauskommen, ne. Und da sag ich mir so, das brauchen die nicht wissen, und, dann ist es besser, man lässt es unter dem Mantel der Verschwiegenheit, ne. Muss man ja nicht."

hospital nurse, and while Monika is openly lesbian to her colleagues, Petra keeps both her private life and her opinions to herself:

Petra (Berlin, 42) and Monika (Berlin, 38)

P: Yes, that's how it is. I mean, at work it's like that as well, yes, they always shy away from such topics, or if not then it's totally condemned as something bad. So what more is there to be said? Nothing much. You make up your own mind about things and that's all there is to it.

M: I always say something provocative in situations like that.

P: Well, *I can't* do that, because nobody is supposed to know about me, nor do they need to [...]. Also, *I don't necessarily want to*.

M: I would somehow.

P: No. I have my opinion ... about it and stick to it, and I don't say everything, because I think they anyhow wouldn't understand anyway, and they don't want to understand either, and they don't want to be confronted with it either, you know. Let's say, if they knew that I am now also [lesbian], they would say: Oh my God, we would have never expected that of you!

M: So what?

P: Whether they would still want to be around me at all, yes, whether they would still see this human being in me, *how I really am*, that of course is the question, because you then get branded with it. [...] Well, you do have to weigh these things up. Whom you can talk to, or whom you can tell what, or what you cannot say. Not all of them want to know about it anyhow, and then you do it that way: ok, *you don't have to* talk about it.⁵²

Petra's choice in constructing her public identity at work is clearly linked to the constraints which she sees as operating on her. Due to the opinions she hears on homosexuality in her town, including her workplace, she keeps her lesbian love story to herself. However, as we can see in this passage, while she suffers from the closed-mindedness of her social environment, she also draws some satisfaction from being able to conduct a more exciting undercover life than what she conveys to others. While she says that she "can't" she immediately adds "I don't necessarily want to". In stating that "you don't have to" tell them, she underlines the choice element in the managing of her secret love life. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how Petra here presents being *out* as a distortion of her *real self*: If her colleagues knew about it, so she

⁵² Italics are here used for matters of illustration only. Original: "P: Ja, iss so. Ich meine – bei uns auf Arbeit iss es auch so, ja, da wir immer so n hohen Bogen um so n Thema gemacht, oder das wird total als was Schlechtes abgeurteilt, und ja was willst n da noch sagen, gar nichts mehr. Da denkst du dir deinen Teil und dann ist gut, ne, und..."

M: Na, ich provoziert ja dann immer.

P: Na ja, ich kann das nicht machen, weil, - es muss keiner wissen bei mir, muss ja nicht so ... ich will auch gar nicht unbedingt ...

M: ...würde halt so...

P: ... nee. Ich hab meine Meinung...dazu und die behalt ich auch, und ich sag dann auch nicht alles, weil ich mir denke, die verstehen's eh nicht und sie wollen's auch nicht verstehen und sie wollen auch nicht damit konfrontiert werden, ne. Sagen wir mal, wenn sie wissen würden, dass ich das jetzt auch so, - dann würden sie sagen, Gott, nee, das hätten wir dir gar nicht zugetraut ...

M: Na und?

P: ... ob sie dann noch Umgang haben wollten, mit mir, - ja ob sie dann noch diesen Menschen sehen in mir, wie ich eigentlich ja bin, - das ist natürlich dann die Frage, ne, weil man kriegt ja dann n Stempel aufgedrückt, [...] Also man muss schon abwägen, mit wem man äh, reden kann oder wem man was offenbaren kann oder nicht, ne. – Äh, alle wollen s auch gar nicht wissen, und, dann machst du dann eben halt so, - gut, - muss ja nicht reden drüber."

thinks, she would risk being seen differently from “how I really am”. According to this, in being “branded” as a lesbian (in the original: “Stempel aufgedrückt”: being “stamped”), her “real” identity would be lost rather than revealed. Her lesbian identity is essentially a hidden one, and the secrecy of her love life a constituent part of it. At least towards her sister, her ability to secretly fool the conservative environment of her hometown is more central to her identity than a potential public recognition within that very town.

In debating whether their respective teenage children should talk to friends about their mothers’ lesbian relationships, the two sisters strongly disagree. Where Monika sees her sister as essentially unfree, Petra yet again underlines her freedom in successfully managing a double life in which she succeeds in avoiding conflicts with others both for her own and her daughter’s sake:

Petra (Berlin, 42) and Monika (Berlin, 38)

P: I do that anyway. *I decide for myself. I do what is good for me.* And I also live *what is good for me.* I don’t need anyone else for that, to tell me: ‘that’s bad’ or something like that. You just have to try things out.

M: But you are contradicting yourself!

P: What?

M: Because if you say you don’t want to live a lesbian relationship openly in your small town, *then you are not free.* You don’t live freely then, with your views.

P: But I do it *undercover.* That doesn’t matter.

M: No.

P: But for me it’s *still this kind of being free.* Do you understand?

M: No, not really, because *you are deluding yourself.* Either you are free and really live that way – well of course you always have some norms you should comply with, whether it’s with the neighbours or whatever, you don’t have to annoy everyone with your way of life, irrespective of which country you come from, I mean, everyone has different rituals and is loud or quiet or whatever. But I think that you are not really free, because you say, for example, that you ...

P: *At home I’m free.*

M: ... would have worries that people, what they say, [your daughter’s] friends’ parents, what they would say. Either you are free and you say: either they like me, and see me as a person, or they should just stay away.⁵³

⁵³ Original: “P: Das mach ich sowieso. Ich entscheide für mich. Ich mach das, was mir gut tut. – Und, ähm, und lebe auch das, was mir gut tut. – Also da brauch ich keinen andern dazu, oder jetzt zu sagen, äh, das ist doof oder so, das muss man eben halt ausprobieren.

M: Aber es widerspricht sich.

P: Was?

M: Weil, wenn du sagst, du möchtest, ne lesbische Beziehung in deinem Nest nicht ausleben, dann bist du ja nicht frei, dann lebst du ja nicht frei, und lebst ja nicht frei, so mit deinen Ansichten.

P: Das mach ich ja so, unter dem Mantel. [...] Das ist ja egal, ...

M: Nee.

P: ... aber, für mich ist es dann aber so trotzdem dieses frei sein. – Verstehste?

M: Nee, nicht wirklich. Weil du machst dir selber was vor. Entweder man ist frei und und lebt tatsächlich so, ich mein es gibt natürlich immer Normen, in denen du dich, äh, in irgendner Form anpassen solltest, ob das die Nachbarn sind oder so, man muss ja nun nicht, alle traktieren mit seiner Lebensweise, egal aus welchem Land du kommst, oder so, ich mein jeder hat so seine verschiedenen Rituale oder ist laut oder leise oder sonst irgendwas. Aber ich denke, - so richtig frei bist du nicht, weil wenn du sagst zum Beispiel, dass du, äh...

The different social contexts of Berlin on the one hand, and Petra's provincial town on the other, appear to imply sharp contrasts between the two sisters' value judgments. For Monika, freedom implies being openly lesbian, but Petra bluntly states that she is free "undercover", "still", "kind of" and free "at home". While in this passage, Petra is saying "I do what is good for me" and underlines her freedom in doing so, she subsequently refers to the city-province divide in pointing to constraints. Here, Petra nuances the element of choice she had in other passages pictured as strength, and secrecy is described as a norm she cannot just leave aside:

Petra (Berlin, 42)

Perhaps I haven't had it for so long that I would think like [Monika]. But I would say it's quite a good thing that everything has kind of become more open. But I cannot for example deal with it in the way [Monika] does, because I'm from a much smaller town, a very narrow-minded town, where everyone knows each other and, for God's sake, that's why we do all that in a more hidden way. Of course it's also more difficult to handle it. Yes, apart from that, a lot still needs to be done, I would say.⁵⁴

Petra argues that "a lot still needs to be done". Some would probably argue that the construction of a secret gay or lesbian identity is bound to be linked to discrimination and homophobia, if not a directly experienced one then a form of internalized homophobia, i.e. that she has adopted the norms of an environment that is hostile to homosexuality. They would then tend to disqualify this sort of double life as either forced by ambivalent discrimination or as hypocritical in the absence of social constraints.

But it is this sort of judgment that exemplifies the value shift from a taboo of homosexuality to a norm of endorsing public lesbian and gay identities. This shift in turn influences the construction of identities, where the concept of homosexuality itself moves from sexual activity to public partnership, for instance. Hidden homosexual identities seem hard to justify in the context of Berlin, as exemplified in Monika's reaction to Petra's secrecy.

P: Zuhause bin ich frei.

M: ... Sorgen hättest, wenn du Sorgen hättest, dass so, dass die Leute, was die sagen oder, die Eltern, der, der Freundin von Anne, was die sagen. Entweder ist man frei, und sagt, entweder die können mich leiden, oder die sehen mich als Mensch, oder die sollen wegbleiben.

⁵⁴ Original: "Vielleicht hab ich das noch nicht so lange, - - dass ich jetzt so denke wie [Renate]. Aber - ich sag mal es ist ganz gut, dass es eben halt - offener geworden ist alles, ne. - Aber ich kann zum Beispiel nicht so wie [Renate] jetzt damit umgehen, weil ich komm aus 'ner viel kleineren Stadt, - aus 'ner sehr spießigen Stadt, wo einer so fast jeden, - jeder kennt jeden und - Gottes Willen - also deswegen, - machen wir das alles n bisschen versteckter. - Ist natürlich auch schwieriger, damit umzugehen. - Ja ansonsten, - - muss noch viel getan werden sag ich mal."

5.2.6. Public – private – hidden – secret: What about marriage?

It has often been pointed out that in the Western world the distinction between the public and the private sphere implies that homosexuality be restricted to a private (and shameful) practice, notwithstanding its legalization. On this view, it is seen as inferior to the heterosexual public sphere. As Didier Eribon points out: “[T]he public sphere is heterosexual and homosexuals are relegated to the sphere of their private lives.”⁵⁵ All of a sudden, one can argue, with the state recognition of lesbian and gay partnership and the “banalisation” of the coming out of public personalities, this affirmation seems to have become obsolete. The legal document of partnership recognition is by definition public, and the act of marriage or partnership registration can be regarded as an encouragement precisely to drag homosexual identity into the public sphere.⁵⁶ Indeed, it could thus be argued, from the perspective of coming out narratives, that marriage can be the ultimate form of coming out, as we had seen evoked in Matthew’s narrative about future “marriage” plans: “It’s just, well, that’s us, and this is us, we are a union, we are a couple, and to the whole world: ‘This is who we are.’” (see 4.3) The idea of marriage as the ultimate form of “coming out” would put the public certificate on a par with an unambiguous openness of homosexual identity in all spheres of social life.⁵⁷ This question will be developed further in chapter 6 regarding the normative transformations which the recognition of same-sex couples represents. In the context of this chapter, it shows how the question of identity management is closely linked to the recognition of same sex couples and the considerations of using such an option to formalize a relationship. However, precisely on this point, as far as gays and lesbians are concerned, a certain resistance to trust fully the acceptance of the “public sphere” *as such* can be observed. Gérard Ignasse in his analysis of “marriage ads” in newspapers for gay and lesbian Pacs celebrations notes the absence of surnames in most of the newspaper ads:

⁵⁵ D. Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*: 148. Original: “[L]’espace public est hétérosexuel et les homosexuels sont relégués dans l’espace de leur vie privée.”

⁵⁶ One should point out that in France, the public access to the names of the “paced” partners has specifically been prohibited in order to avoid the public access to knowledge about the homosexuality of the persons involved: “the register is not open to the public because it is susceptible to contain elements that touch upon the private life of the contractors.” (Original: “le registre n’est pas ouvert au public car il est susceptible de comporter des éléments touchant à la vie privée des intéressés.”), *Circulaire du 10 novembre 1999*, in Caroline Mécary and Flora Leroy-Forgeot. *Le Pacs*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000): 63

⁵⁷ Fassin (2005), *L’inversion*: 99

Isabelle-Aude and Isabelle
Are glad to announce that they have signed a Pacs
For one hundred years of happiness or more
On February 15th in Paris – 3rd arrondissement⁵⁸

Ignasse refers to the fear of homophobic persecution to explain this phenomenon; anonymous ads are clearly unusual in the case of heterosexual marriages.⁵⁹ Here again, we should point to a careful and often pragmatic case-by-case management of various public identities. On a factual level, the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships offers one further possibility for forging a public homosexual identity, where the signature before the state authorities *per se* represents a public expression. The management of the various aspects of most homosexual identities apparently (and probably increasingly) escapes a clear-cut classification into the categories public, private, or secret.

The case of Petra and Monika helped to illustrate several aspects of the analysis on identity management. A distinction was drawn between constraint and ideology as criteria for how identity is managed in specific settings. In turn, constraint has been seen as a category to which various levels can be accorded, ranging from explicit experiences to imagined risks and taboos. Ideology, as has been said, can be challenged as a concept and can in turn be seen as ultimately forged out of social constraints: it would thus appear not to be based on “real” choice, as Monika claims in the dialogue with her sister. Finally, the question of marriage sits slightly uncomfortably in such a construction of identity: can it be regarded as the “ultimate coming out” that swipes out strategic identity management, or, quite differently, is it itself subject to the case-by-case evaluation, as in the case of the “Pacs ads” reviewed by Ignasse. Alternatively, and more generally, is it feasible to “marry secretly”, as Bianca suggested: “My parents [would] get a heart attack. [But] it’s not said that you would necessarily have to say it. You would do it [with] those who know.” (See 4.3)

The following schema represents these categories as leading to four different scenarios of gay and lesbian identities: public (openly lesbian/gay in a specific setting), private (choosing not to be open in a presumably accepting environment), hidden (having to hide being lesbian/gay), or secret (seeing “privacy” as a good thing in an unaccepting environment).

⁵⁸ Ignasse, ed. (2002), *Les pacsé-e-s*: 42. Original: “Isabelle-Aude et Isabelle sont heureuses de vous annoncer qu’elles se sont pacsées, pour cent ans de bonheur et +, le 15 février à Paris – 3^e arrdt.”

⁵⁹ Ibid

	(level of constraint)		
	“accepting environment”	“unaccepting environment”	
(ideology)	“want to be out”	public	hidden
	“distinguish between public and private”	private	secret

Questions of secrecy and the influence of normative environment of public identities have so far been looked at in terms of closeted identities or being "out", i.e. talking about being homosexual or not. Homosexuality has often been ascribed to the realm of secrecy. Long excluded from the public sphere in which legitimate intimacy is set on a par with heterosexual marriage, we can argue that homosexual intimacy has slowly moved upwards through the categories of secret, private, and public. With the decriminalization of homosexuality, the pursuit of a private homosexual life became feasible, fitting into a space of private freedom. This "private homosexuality" however was mostly accompanied by a "don't-ask-don't-tell" policy: you can do whatever you want, but don't display it in public.⁶⁰ Under this perspective, the move from the secret to the private is followed by the "recognition" step, where the legal and official acknowledgment of homosexual partnership means that same-sex intimacies have by definition become a public matter.⁶¹ In those countries where partnership recognition exists for same-sex couples, same-sex partnerships can now be found in legal texts, in registers, in declarations of state officials. However, at the level of the individual, such a linear change does not necessarily have an impact on how identities are lived in different environments.

A careful exploration of the attitudes encountered within a specific setting is a common strategy, either at work, in the family, towards friends, or in certain neighbourhoods. In the fieldwork that was conducted, some do not encounter problems through being openly "out" in most of their social settings. Many however do; they face potential risk, sometimes based on their own or others' experiences, and sometimes on imagination or prejudice. As we have seen throughout this chapter, most often, specific social settings require a case-by-case management. Thus, today just as in the past, gay or lesbian identities can be lived publicly in one setting but not in another.⁶²

⁶⁰ See again Broqua and de Busscher's analysis of the decline of the "don't ask don't tell" identity, Broqua and de Busscher (2003), "La crise de la normalisation": 26ff.

⁶¹ For such a three step analysis, see for example Leroy-Forgeot (1998), *Histoire juridique*.

⁶² See also George Chauncey on homosexuals' "double life" in early 20th century New York, Chauncey (1994), *Gay New York*: 133f.

5.2.7. "Coming out" versus "case-by-case"

Ken Plummer had described the coming out discourse as a "modernist tale" of liberation:⁶³ the "coming out discourse" can be characterized as the overcoming of a conflict or a taboo, of finding acceptance despite a crisis and the fear of discrimination. One should however be careful to distinguish between the biographical narrative of the "coming out" and an analytical perspective on the social construction of identities. Mark for example in the following extract provides a "coming out narrative" that clearly corresponds to such a model:

Mark (London, 40)

FJ: To come back to what you said, that it used to be much more difficult when you grew up. Did you have any negative experiences then or was it just that ...

M: I never ...

FJ: ... it was a taboo as you said?

M: ... I never had negative experiences. I think the thing that I was negative about was, I was brought up in a village and people used to talk about queers and poofs and therefore I thought it was going to be much more difficult to come out than it was. And then when I did come out, you know, I was the first, the only gay in the village. [laughs]

FJ: Yes.

M: I was in my village, and, you know, people accepted me, all my friends and all my family.

FJ: Yeah.

M: And I've never had a negative experience.

Mark's "coming out story" was recurrent throughout the fieldwork as regards its main elements. "People used to talk about queers and poofs" and "I was negative about it" form the main elements of the closeted past, while the turning point ("I did come out") leads to a liberation ("people accepted me") and a retrospective re-evaluation of the fears that had been oppressive ("I thought it was going to be much more difficult").

While this narrative provides an ideal type of a coming out narrative, one needs to distinguish the discursive element from social behaviour in practice. This of course is difficult if interviews are not backed up by participant observation or other research strategies. In Mark's case, however, we can see a contradiction between the "coming out story" concerning his village, which tells of liberation and a coherently "out" identity on the one hand, and his case-to-case management in the London suburb where he lives and works:

Mark (London, 40)

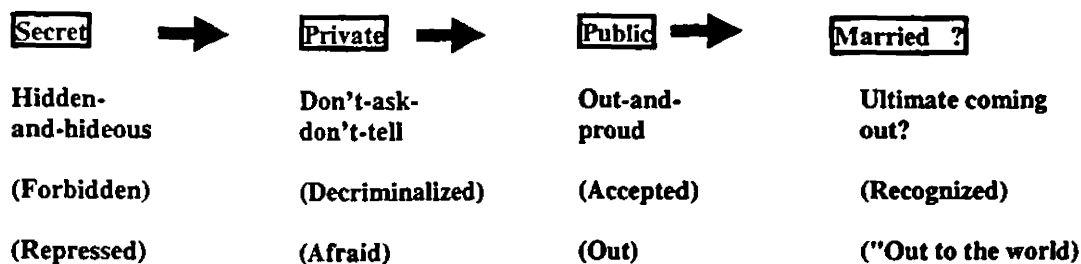
I think in the suburbs, people kind of know who you are and where you're from and what you do. [...] I don't expose myself, because I'm not out, I don't think I'm openly gay looking and

⁶³ On the question of "coming out" from a discourse analysis perspective, see Ken Plummer, "Coming out, breaking the silence and recovering. Introducing some modernist tales", in Plummer (1995) *Telling Sexual Stories*: 50-61

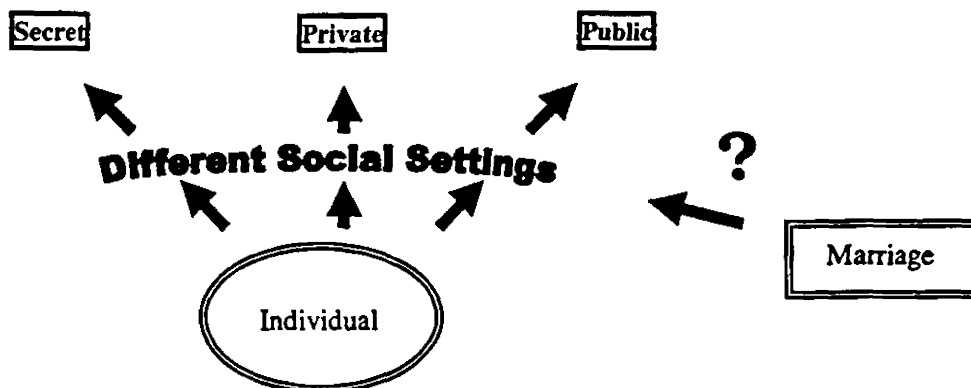
you know, I'm not camp, I'm not effeminate.[...] I know a guy, that's one of my customers, he's very effeminate, he's very camp. And people do like him, but the minute he's gone they joke about him and laugh about him behind his back.

Mark clearly thinks that in the "suburbs" it is better not to expose oneself too much. Mark does not explicitly refer to the social setting in the suburb as oppressive or discriminatory. Instead, "different" is repeatedly used to distinguish the suburbs from the centre where "you can lose yourself". However there is an argumentative link here between his privacy ("I don't expose myself", "I'm not out") and the observations he makes about a customer in the restaurant he manages: "they laugh about him behind his back, so". The consequential "so" connects to the "different" attitude that Mark adopts as a result. Accordingly, as far as his everyday life is concerned, a case-by-case evaluation of different settings stands in the foreground. This arguable contradiction between the "coming out narrative" in the village and the strategic privacy in the suburbs may partly be explained through a different degree of social acceptance (his village being more accepting than his suburb in East London), but is equally blended by 1) his biographical perspective (he does not actually live in the village anymore and is not concerned about whether people there talk behind his back) and 2) the legitimacy which a coming out discourse carries in constructing a life narrative – in particular in lesbian and gay environments: it stands for the courage to overcome societal pressures and is best received if it has a happy ending. While the coming out narrative is a fascinating one for sociological discourse analysis, it can thus easily be flawed as an analytical concept. From the perspective of identity management, it is the parents and the village that move from secret and private to public (according to what he says) but *not* his identity *as such*.

Historical progress perspective / biographical liberation perspective:



Case-by-case / identity management perspective:



As the diagram above shows, one can thus distinguish between two perspectives in which secret, private, and public identities are described – as we have argued in this section. A linear one is either based on a different time sequence regarding the history of homosexuality (see also chapter 2), or a personal "coming out" narrative, such as in Mark's parents' village or in Owen's case with his parents in Northern Ireland, in which shame is followed by self-consciousness, followed by conflict and finally by the overcoming of conflict.

In the "coming out" perspective, as in the perspective of historical progress, marriage stand as the ultimate achievement: the ultimate coming out on the personal level, and the ultimate recognition of homosexuality on the legal and societal level.⁶⁴

The second perspective that is shown in the diagram is the identity management perspective that we have considered to be useful in describing a case-by-case management that was

⁶⁴ As mentioned above, see Eric Fassin's suggestion of same-sex marriage as the "coming out" "par excellence". See Fassin (2005), *L'inversion*: 99

present in most narratives. In this perspective, there is no linear development and no uniform application of "secret", "private" and "public". Marriage arrives with a question mark: how can such an institution relate to the kind of identity management that we have encountered?

Finally, the difference between the linear understanding of "coming out" on the one hand, and identity management on the other, can be exemplified by changing the perspective on what identity management signifies beyond the question of being publicly "gay" or "lesbian". As a process that applies to any individual in any complex social environment, for gays and lesbians the management of identity and secrecy also concerns the way in which identities are constructed *within* specifically homosexual environments. The following examples provide the examples of the construction of sexual identity, first within a relationship, and thereafter within the gay and lesbian "scene" more generally.

5.2.8. Double lives again

A gay or lesbian identity goes beyond the question of the fact of being gay or lesbian, but is also, and probably most importantly, about how homosexuality is lived. Throughout the fieldwork of this study, needless to say, respondents as we have seen in quite some detail, had extremely different understandings of homosexuality, including sex life, whether it was a good thing to be in a long-term relationship, or to be faithful or not and under what circumstances etc. Within gay and lesbian lives, different identities can in turn apply, as in the case of "double lives". To illustrate this we can turn to the interview with Mark again, who discovered his long-term partner to be regularly frequenting cruising areas for casual sex encounters. He points to his boyfriend's different sexual identities:

Mark (London, 40)

FJ: How did you find out about it, did he tell you about it?

M: He never told me about it, I found out about it. I caught him out, twice.

FJ: And how did you find out?

M: Probably just because he'd been in cruising grounds and it came out when I used to do the washing. I used to wash the clothes and I, I – the knees on his jeans were very dirty, and – he put them in the washer inside out. And I'd do the washing and pulled them back the other way and see that they were dirty, so I knew he'd been cruising, and – I just, - I just, - questioned him about it and he admitted it to me. - Twice.

FJ: Yeah.

M: I, I didn't question him, I told him I knew already, so then he admitted it.

FJ: Yeah.

M: But he had a history of cruising and stuff like that anyway.

The narrative provides for a parallel with images of gendered heterosexual couples in which one partner does the washing (the wife) and discovers evidence of the other partner (the husband) cheating, such as a note in the pockets. In difference to the discourses on "betrayals" in chapter 4, Mark gives an image here of his boyfriend's "cruising" habits as being a separate identity, described as a "history of cruising", whereby the passage evokes the notion of a double identity, a gay man who lives in a stable relationship on the one hand, but who lives a separate, secret life of casual sex on the other.

As the various examples throughout the interview material illustrate, the construction of different public and private identities plays a role at various levels, including the construction of different identities within gay and lesbian life choices themselves. In the example of Mario's "cheating" on his boyfriend Dario it had been seen that secrecy could apply to the partner but, in that case, at the same time an openness to the sociologist. This viewing of lesbian and gay identities as multilayered and adapted to various settings including homosexual ones thereby somewhat contrasts with a linear view of "being in the closet" and "coming out".

5.2.9. Subculture norms and identity construction: Constraints from the other side?

The social constraints concerning the construction of public identities take a different perspective when considering a gay and/or lesbian environment as a subculture with its own normative codes. Of course, homosexual subcultures have their modes of behaviour, social constraints and peer expectations.⁶⁵ In the interviews conducted here, these were not in the main focus; as a result, they were less explicitly pointed to. When norms in the "gay and lesbian scene" were discussed, they were mostly not represented as experienced in the same way as hostile heterosexual environments, as constraints and risks. In the context of a range of topics however, such a normative conflict was addressed, particularly so where promiscuity and attitudes towards bisexuality were involved, as we have seen in the previous two chapters. In chapter four, we noted various observations of how a range of respondents regard a norm of promiscuity as connected to the gay (and more rarely but also lesbian) milieu in the respective cities. Only a few respondents described this as a constraint. Richard for instance had pronounced regret at having to withdraw hopes of an exclusive committed partnership in the Parisian milieu. But mostly, when this normative context was mentioned it was described not

as a constraint but rather as a normative environment and a lifestyle that one potentially needs to adapt to. In many cases it was said to be easily resisted, whilst in others the norms was seen as potentially making long-term relationships difficult.

Following a different line of thought, the question of how bisexuality can be expressed within gay and lesbian milieus was sometimes described as problematic or as hypocritical, as we have already seen in Sven's account in chapter 3. He described the gay scene as being hostile and "intolerant" towards bisexuality. More than among his straight friends, whom he finds more accepting, he argued that there was an expectation of homogeneity in a gay social environment: "intolerance of the gay community when you don't exactly fit the grid".⁶⁵

While Sven voiced a bisexual identity despite not having had sexual relationships with women in recent years, Katharina suggests that the opposite can be the case. According to her, many women in a lesbian setting obscure their heterosexual affairs: she believes that many women do not mention opposite-sex attractions in front of their lesbian friends:

Katharina (London, 22)

K: I am not as stuck up ("verschroben") as many lesbians who wouldn't even hold a man conversation with a man just because of [laughs] his sex, so I wouldn't fix myself. But yes, women will perhaps win the race in the end maybe.

FJ: Does that happen often? Do you think that lesbian women in particular somehow don't want to talk to men?

K: Mmm, well, that was a bit exaggerated on my behalf. But I know for example that very few of the so-called lesbians really are 100% lesbian, but nobody talks about it. I don't mean that for my circle of friends of course, but when you have superficial friendships, well I know some characters who would in fact never admit that they also have [affairs] with men sometimes, yes, and so on, because well. That would then, I don't know, would perhaps not be recognized in lesbian circles, that's my impression.

J: I see it exactly like that too.⁶⁷

Katharina distinguishes between her own attitude towards bisexuality, the accepting attitude of her friends and a general norm among lesbians ("sehr viele Lesben", "in lesbischen Kreisen").

⁶⁵ As an literary example on effeminate culture see e.g. Didier Eribon's use of an extract from Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, in Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*: 11

⁶⁶ Original: "Intoleranz der Schwulen community wenn du nicht genau dann in ihr Raster passt."

⁶⁷ Original: "K: Ich bin nicht so verschroben wie sehr viele Lesben, die vielleicht nicht einmal mit einem Mann eine Unterhaltung pflegen nur aufgrund [lacht kurz] seines Geschlechts. Also [ich] würde mich da nicht so festlegen. Aber, ja, die Frauen werden vielleicht letztendlich vielleicht doch das Rennen machen. - FJ: Kommt das oft vor? Meinst du, dass gerade lesbische Frauen nicht so mit Männern irgendwie reden wollen? - K: Mmm, also, das war jetzt etwas überzogen meiner von meiner Seite. Aber ich weiß zum Beispiel, dass die wenigsten so genannten Lesben wirklich auch hundert Prozent lesbisch sind, bloß spricht keiner drüber. Auf den Freundeskreis beziehe ich das natürlich nicht, aber jetzt, wenn man so oberflächliche Bekanntschaften pflegt halt, also ich kenne so einige Exemplare, die eigentlich nie zugeben würden, dass sie auch mal mit Männern, ja, und so weiter, weil also das würde dann, weiß ich nicht, vielleicht so, in den lesbischen Kreisen vielleicht nicht so anerkannt werden, hab ich den Eindruck. - J: Seh ich genauso."

In the latter one, according to Katharina, bisexuality is not accepted, and bisexual identities are a taboo – they are not talked about. This taboo is contrasted by Katharina's claim that "very few of these so-called lesbians really are 100% lesbian", a controversial statement within the lesbian scene according to Katharina's own account: They would thus appear to be in a bisexual "closet", not daring to talk about heterosexual desires or encounters. Her friend Jenny shares Katharina's account with an approving comment, which gives this discourse the character of a jointly acknowledged account among these two young women. Although, it is important to stress, this says little – if anything – that is reliable regarding women's actual sexual behaviour in the Berlin lesbian scene, Katharina and Jenny's account shows how they approach this milieu with a certain distance from the normative context which they observe in it. Katharina indeed describes a potential conflict between her own views and desires to construct her identity on the one hand, and the attitude within "lesbian circles" as she observes them on the other. For other women who identify themselves as bisexual, such a taboo, in her view represents a constraint on their identity within the lesbian milieu.

We should set aside the question as to whether such observations concerning bisexuality are peculiar to the milieu in Berlin, or even here whether they are significant beyond the discourses that we have seen. Gabriella in Rome for example, whom we encountered in chapter 3, also identified as bisexual, but did not raise any similar issues at any time during the interview. In the context of this chapter however, the mentioning of the theme of bisexuality provides a perspective from which to consider the different social settings both as normatively influential (and as potentially constraining) the formation of public identities – including the lesbian and gay milieu itself. It serves as an example of how constraints and potential risks can influence the construction of identity within gay and lesbian social settings to the extent that they do in non-homosexual settings.

Another such example of how norms specific to homosexual milieus influence the construction of identities is what Owen calls the "clone culture", where he describes norms in gay culture that are linked to commercialisation and "skinny tops":

Owen (London, 26)

There's the clone culture. If I was being really pernickety, I would distinguish myself, I would identify myself as homosexual rather than gay. I think gay has become an identity now that, I find quite narrow. And I find it quite frustrating, and I find the scene narrow and frustrating, by and large. And I think that - I don't know - there's this targeting of the pink pound as well. So there's a lot of marginalisation of what gay is and what gay buys and [...] there's a narrowing and, I don't know, [laughs], [...] when eighteen year-old boys come out and they start going out on the gay scene: they maybe for six weeks come out and they're shy and their big toes are

facing each other and they sort of car in a corner of a bar, and then, within the space of another three months, they're wearing skinny tops and doing the whole thing. And maybe it's fun for them for a while, but it seems to suck people into a very homogenized fixed picture of what it is to be gay. And I think young gay people are probably still quite, well, are definitely still quite vulnerable.

Owen's description of a clone culture is not a description of intolerance as we saw in Katharina's and Sven's accounts. His use of the term is not the same as in the literature where "clone culture" generally refers to the emphasized "macho" masculine look of (particularly US American) gays around 1980, sometimes including moustaches.⁶⁸ But the image of the clone here refers to what others call the "ghetto culture", referring to the uncritical adaptation to gay lifestyles and dress codes. Owen describes such a process of adaptation: younger gays are socialized ("sucked in") into a homogenous, "narrow" code of behaviour. To be sure, the account could have been described as a "coming out" phase during which young gays become more self-aware and assertive, from being, in Owen's own description, "shy" teenagers who are lacking self confidence, as indicated by the image of "their big toes facing each other". But the coming out process here becomes a "coming in process". Owen mentions the "pink pound", referring to a "frustrating" (in his words) appropriation of gay culture (less so concerning lesbian culture) by market strategies.⁶⁹ "Skinny tops" instead serve as a reference to the body oriented culture in the male gay scene – under this rationale, yet again, the conformity to aesthetic ideals (young looking, sporty, slim or muscular bodies) can hardly be resisted.⁷⁰

Other examples of norms within homosexual milieus include discontent about political opinions in the gay and lesbian scene, various ideas about sexuality, or a presumed hostility to heterosexuals. On this latter view, the gay and lesbian culture is criticised as a "ghetto culture", such as in Mario's narrative: Mario refers to negative comments from gay friends when he brought straight friends along to a meeting point behind the Roman forum:

⁶⁸ Martin P. Levine. *The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998)

⁶⁹ The Pink Pound debate in the UK is linked to the idea of promoting the gay community and the respectability of homosexuality through the market influence and spending power homosexuals have. "In Britain it is often called the Pink Pound, in the US the Dorothy Dollar. [...] [I]t serves the gay press to promote the community. [...] Big names like American Express, American Airlines, Virgin Atlantic and Apple Computers have recognised the sectors [sector's] spending. Citroen cars decided to sponsor the Manchester Gay and Lesbian mardis-gras. [...] [T]here is a Gay Day at Disney event. Mickey Mouse has taken the Dorothy Dollar before someone else snatches it first." Richard Quest, *BBC news online*, 31/7/1998. www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/the_economy/142998.stm

⁷⁰ Gay body culture is less of a recent phenomenon, but still pronounced with historical specificities in the past decades. As Brendan Lemon puts it: "[Since] the '70 [...] [i]t became compulsory for the urban homosexual to go—proudly—to the gym to acquire a V-shaped torso, taut abs, and bulging biceps." See Brendan Lemon. "Male beauty – the current trend on gay-male aesthetics" *The Advocate*, July 22, 1997, unpagged online version. This article refers to US gay culture – the current European trend can largely be regarded as analogous in this respect.

Mario (Rome, 25)

F: The understanding between straights and gays is something I have always been fighting for, and that I have noticed others don't. I don't know if you know Monte Cheprino?

FJ: Mmm, no.

F: Monte Cheprino is a cruising area; let's call it like that, which is close to Piazza Venezia. [...] Well, it's a cruising area because it is used by all those who go there, they try to pull; then they stay there watching all those who arrive. And in that place, we have created a group of friends, [...] a group that meets there, as a meeting point. [...] I mean, you have a beer; you have a chat; you have a smoke. [...] And when I brought along [...] two or three of my [straight] friends including this best friend of mine, in order to be there, to talk, because perhaps he wanted to spend an evening with me, I told him, I was going to go there, let's go out, let's go there, no problem, I'll introduce them to you, no [problem]. And [my gay friends there] insisted [...]: "if you are with the other [gays], you'll be gay as well. If not, what are you doing here with us?" I [instead] see it like that: "No," I said, "excuse me, but why [for] gays, a straight guy who comes out with gays needs to be made gay?" [...] I mean a straight guy that gets along with a gay one, well, maybe there would not be the need for the Pacs; there wouldn't be the need for anything. We'd all live in harmony without any type of problems. [...] However, if you go around hand in hand, no one bothers you. If you, as the first one, being gay, start to think that the straight guy, as soon as he comes with you, does it because he wants to be with you, because the gay one at the end wants him, - no. I mean we complain so much that the straights aren't open minded when we are the first ones to put ourselves to the side, - no. No. That's not right. [...] If we are the first ones to put ourselves into a ghetto, what should the others say? It's obvious that they are not open to us either [then].⁷¹

The place where he meets his friends is referred to as a cruising place for casual sex. Therefore, one might think, seems somewhat odd that Mario is surprised by the critical comments from friends concerning the company of men altogether uninterested in these activities. Mario says: "The understanding between straights and gays is something I have always been fighting for." Fighting for the heterosexualization of sexual cruising spaces, as in the described case, is bound to be met by hostility. The cruisers, it might be argued, are not trying to change society, but rather conquering a social space for living sexuality in a manner that is suitable to them. They may want to socialize with people who live a different sexuality in different spaces. Mario's discourse is not so much about the intolerance of the gays he talks about, as in Katharina's experience. He is probably very conscious of the provocation which his idea of

⁷¹ Original: "M: La convivenza tra etero e gay è una cosa su cui mi sono sempre battuto, e che ho notato che gli altri non fanno. Non so se tu conosci Monte Cheprino? - FJ: Mm, no. - F: Monte Cheprino è un luogo di battuage. Chiamiamolo così. Che sta verso piazza Venezia. Cioè, è un luogo di battouage perché comunque viene utilizzato per tutti quanti che vanno là, cercano a rimorchiarci, poi si infrattano, in tutto quelli che vengono d'arrivare. [...] Abbiamo fatto una committiva lì, [...] un gruppo amici che si incontra lì, come posto di ritrovo. [...] Cioè, prendi una birra, ti fai una chiacchierata, ti fumi una sigaretta. [...] E quando portai [...] due o tre amici miei [etero] tra cui questo mio migliore amico là, [per] stare lì, per parlare, perché magari lui voleva uscire con me, io ho fatto sto andando là, usciamo, andiamo là, senza problemi, a loro ti faccio conoscere senza [problemi]. E loro insistevano che lui intanto deve prima o poi, "se stai con gli [altri gay] diventerai gay anche tu." "Se no, che vieni a fa' qua con noi?" - Io la vedo così, "no," ho fatto: "scusa, ma perché [per] i gay, un etero se viene con i gay deve essere fatto gay?" [...] Cioè, il fatto che un etero che riesca a convivere con un gay, eh, magari. Non ci sarebbe bisogno della Pacs, non ci sarebbe bisogno di niente. Viveremmo tutti quanti in armonia senza nessun tipo di problemi. [...] Comunque, se tu vai in giro, mano per mano, nessuno ti rompe coglioni. [...] Se tu, primo, gay, incominci a pensare che l'etero nei momenti in cui viene con te e perché ci vuole star con te, perché comunque alla fine il gay vuole lui, - no. Cioè, noi ci lamentiamo tanto che gli etero non sono aperti mentalmente quando poi noi siamo i

bringing straight friends to the cruising area represents. Instead, he is discursively pointing to a contradiction or a conflict in the aims and interests of gays as a social group. He juxtaposes the exclusion of homosexual behaviour from heterosexual normative environments with the exclusion of heterosexual behaviour from homosexual environment: the presence of his “straight” friend in the cruising area.

The idea of cruising grounds has often been associated with double lives and anonymous sexuality. It could seem that Mario is showing two different aspects of a “gay” political discourse with which he rhetorically engages: the appropriation of own spaces, on the one hand, and the acceptance in mainstream society, on the other. In the cruising area, as Mario tells us, his straight “best friend” is ultimately asked either to become gay or to leave. Thereby, the interpretations of belonging to one group or the other, or belonging to one group in one social setting and to another group in another social setting, are used by Mario not to underline the difficulties of homosexual identities but on the contrary to accuse them of reproducing the same mechanisms of exclusion, as we also saw in Wilhelm’s account.

To summarize, we have seen that a range of normative elements and personal experiences come into play concerning the identity management in different social settings. While (nearly) all respondents feel gay or lesbian in one way or another and see themselves as sharing this homosexual identity, they live their respective identities quite differently, and with sometimes conflicting strategies and ideologies. Beyond the constraints and ideologies that come into play when gay and lesbian identities are managed in a social setting such as the workplace or the family, the last section extended the perspective to the construction of identity within gay and lesbian social settings themselves.

How can these insights be used in theoretical approaches to the study of identity and recognition? How do the observations that were made here link in with broader debates in social and political philosophy? Which approach accounts best for the picture that the analysis of the discourses has provided, and can in turn be used as a framework for reading the findings from a more theoretical perspective? The next section will investigate the different strands of thought concerning identity and recognition – and how, in an analysis of social change and the recognition of same-sex couples, a coherent picture can be provided that takes the diversity of modes of identity construction that we have been looking at into account. In doing so, the next

primi che ci mettiamo da una parte – no. No. Non esiste. – [...] Se siamo i primi noi che ci ghettizziamo, pensa gli

section will be abstract rather than directly related to the empirical work as has largely been the case so far. Both elements will subsequently be linked in chapter 6.

5.3. Recognition and identity

Recognition, a slippery concept

The concept of recognition requires some further theoretical investigation and clarification. It can generally speaking be regarded as a slippery concept, due to the different theoretical strands within which it has been used. Identity and recognition are often used jointly, and this section will provide the basis for disentangling the meanings with which they are used. In turn, the findings and considerations about identity taken forward from the analysis of the discourses encountered in the fieldwork will provide the basis for a tentative theoretical reformulation of social theory approaches to identity and recognition.

5.3.1. Community and identity?

Within the last decades, 'recognition' has become a buzzword in social and political philosophy, in particular since the rise of contemporary communitarian thought.⁷² According to the latter, a political claim to recognition is often derived from the importance that common identities, such as cultural, linguistic or ethnic identities, have for the individual. From the perspective of a 'politics of recognition', the recognition of diversity and group identities is therefore seen as a central claim for the construction of just institutions.⁷³ In contrast to liberal universalist perspectives, this approach to recognition can be seen as based on the view that the individual acquires meaning only through culture and community. The individual is not seen as free-floating, but as embedded in a specific cultural context, such as in Sandel's concept of the "encumbered self".⁷⁴ Surely, the embeddedness of the individual within a social and cultural context of meaning constitutes a fundamental basis for the sociological and

altri, è ovvio che non sono aperti a noi."

⁷² For an overview see e.g. Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift. *Liberals and Communitarians*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992)

⁷³ Charles Taylor. "Politics of Recognition" Amy Gutman (ed.). *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), or Alasdair MacIntyre (1995), "Is patriotism a virtue."

⁷⁴ Michael Sandel. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

anthropological understanding of what societies are about.⁷⁵ Indeed, in chapter 6, we will analyze how changing patterns of social norms and references for identity construction directly impact on how individuals conceive of their identities and lives. However, communitarian or multiculturalist approaches to recognition arguably result in various problems and flaws.⁷⁶

An important criticism of liberal interpretations in theorizing identity has often been that it does not live up to sociological truths about the way that individuals' goals are constituted in their normative context. In response to this, drawing on the empirical findings and the analysis of identity management, it seems that too fixed an understanding of recognition in turn does not account for choice and fluidity in identity construction. In other words, there is more to the question of homosexuality than having "one" identity. But at the same time, we will be critical of too strong a view of the individual agent in managing his or her identity, as will be shown in chapter 6: the individual is bombarded by societal images that constitute foundational elements of identity construction. Thus, in reviewing the impact of changing norms on identity, the social constitution of individuality needs to be accounted for. While some approaches to recognition are specifically based on the idea that the individual cannot choose her identity, and needs to be recognized because of this unchosen identity, such a view itself does not allow for a full understanding of the identity management perspective that we have presented here, and thus does not sufficiently account for the role of the individual in actively constructing his or her identity.

In the light of the sociological analysis that has been conducted, the liberal reading of the individual needs to be placed both in a normative, historical and political context. As an example of a liberal view of the individual in contemporary political philosophy, we can look at John Rawls account of the person. For Rawls, the individual has a conception of the good, but, as it were, it is secondary: the individual is free to change it.

As free persons, citizens recognize one another as having the moral power to have a conception of the good. This means that they do not view themselves as inevitably tied to the pursuit of the particular conception of the good and its final ends which they espouse at any given time.

⁷⁵ See Peter Wagner. *Theorizing Modernity: inescapability & attainability in social theory*. (London: Sage, 2001): 64ff

⁷⁶ To be sure, Will Kymlicka's often cited understanding of multiculturalism, in contrast to communitarian positions, represents an instrumental defence of group rights within liberal theory, see Will Kymlicka. *Multicultural Citizenship*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). It nevertheless leads to similar problems.

Instead, as citizens, they are regarded as, in general, capable of revising and changing this conception on reasonable and rational grounds.⁷⁷

Thus, Rawls' notion of the "conception" of the good is one that, if not actively chosen, it is subject to individual revision. Under the liberal understanding of the individual, what is important is not so much the independence of the individual from the social norms that surround her (which indeed seems impossible to assert from a sociological point of view), but rather the critical capacity to either embrace, reject or appropriate available norms. This means that individuals, in Rawls' terms, are not "inevitably tied" to them. This aspect of the individual's stance to changing norms has been underlined in the analysis of how the respondents viewed partnership norms and models of couple and family life.

Communitarians, in contrast, see the self as deeply imbedded in the cultural values, such as MacIntyre, who sees selves as "bearers of particular social identity", or Taylor who asserts that without community the "self [would be] without purpose."⁷⁸ As we have argued, however, under a communitarian understanding of recognition politics, a recurrent problem is that the recognition of specific group identities will inevitably fail to grasp the fluidity and mutability inherent both in the individual and the group.⁷⁹ A "politics of recognition" approach such as Charles Taylor's is based on the question "Who am I?" while, as various critics have pointed out, it may be necessary to consider identities as "wide selves", transcending friendships, family relationships, ethnic and national identities etc.⁸⁰ As Nancy Fraser puts it:

The overall effect is to impose a single, drastically simplified group-identity which denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pulls of their own affiliations. Ironically, then, the identity model serves as a vehicle for misrecognition.⁸¹

The question of same-sex couples has often served as a paramount example in various approaches to recognition,⁸² both in the politics of recognition approaches, but also and in particular in the liberal approaches to recognition which mostly combine identity and equality with principles of justice. One can here mention Elisabetta Galeotti's Toleration as

⁷⁷ John Rawls. "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory: the Dewey Lectures." (*Journal of Philosophy* n. 77, 1980): 544

⁷⁸ Taylor (1994), "Politics of Recognition", MacIntyre. *After virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), p. 204

⁷⁹ See e.g. Anthony Kwame Appiah. "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections." Gerthe Peterson (ed.). *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. (Salt Lake City: University-of Utah-Press, 1996)

⁸⁰ David Copp. "Social unity and the identity of persons." (*The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No 4, 2002: 365-391)

⁸¹ Nancy Fraser (2000), "Rethinking recognition": 112

Recognition⁸³ in which an entire chapter is dedicated to same-sex couples, which we will discuss below in the justice approach to the recognition of same-sex couples.

It can be argued that the case of same-sex couples represents a strategic counter-weight to the approach to identity that is implied in political debates on ethnic and cultural recognition (such as for an ethnic community as in some of Charles Taylor's and Kymlicka's works). This leads in to the fact that the question of homosexuality links recognition to a concept that is associated with a break from the past and traditional family values and with a reinvention of norms. Indeed, for a range of social theorists, gay identities are viewed as heralds of individualization and choice-centred relationships.⁸⁴ Thereby, in turn, for defenders of an identity based approach to recognition, through the reference to homosexuality as an example of it, the criticism of "identity politics" as potentially oppressive or culturally conservative is seemingly diluted.

5.3.2. *Recognizing norms*

From what has been said above about the variety of homosexual public and private identities, and the viewing of identity management as a process of construction, the idea of recognition cannot be understood as recognizing a "gay and lesbian identity" as such. Instead, it is the recognition of certain norms that must be discussed. By some, this recognition, for example of a certain public homosexual identity, can indeed be lived as the non-recognition of individual life choices that may stand in conflict with their identity construction if it is based on secrecy or privacy. Thus, while the legal recognition of same-sex partnership enforces an identity based on proclaimed partnership, it can be lived as a setback for those who identify with a don't-ask-don't-tell conception of homosexuality, such as defended in Christophe's "secret garden". Choices of identity construction can be challenged through such a recognition trend, as we saw in the interview with Petra in which Monika challenges her sister Petra's secretive identity:

⁸² On an analysis of the different philosophical discourses on gay marriage, see e.g. Janet Halley. "Recognition, Rights, Regulation, Normalisation: Rhetorics of Justification in the Same-Sex Marriage Debate." Wintemute and Andenaes (2001), *Legal Recognition*: 97-111

⁸³ Galeotti (2002), *Tolerance as Recognition*

⁸⁴ E.g. Anthony Giddens (1992), *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p 15: "Gay women and men have preceded most heterosexuals in developing relationships, in the sense that the term has come to assume today when applied to personal life [...] in conditions of relative equality between partners."

Petra (Berlin, 42) and Monika (Berlin, 38) [synthetic repetition]

P: *I decide for myself. I do what is good for me. And I also live what is good for me. I don't need anyone else for that, to tell me: 'that's bad' or something like that. You just have to try things out.*

P: *You contradict yourself! [...] you are not free. You don't live freely [...] with your views.*

P: *But I do it undercover. [...] for me it's still this kind of being free. Do you understand?*

M: *No, [...] you are deluding yourself. [...] I think that you are not really free [...].*

P: *At home I'm free.*

This shift in turn influences the construction of identities, where the concept of homosexuality moves along with value shifts in society. Further examples of such "challenges" will be given analysed in 6.2 when looking at the specific normative shifts that we have observed. This can be seen especially but not exclusively on the generational level. Recognition is always the recognition of values in the first place. The question has to be: *what aspect* of the person is being recognized? And *how* is the person being recognized?

The various realities of how public identities are created in divergent social environments, where a case-by-case management of openness or privacy remains a dominant feature, provide the background for the question as to how partnership institutions are judged by the respondents. The discussion on the concepts of identity and recognition in connection with a fieldwork approach are fundamental to a study of the social and legal recognition of same-sex partnerships as understood here. The experience of recognition and the desire to be accepted in social environments, as we have seen, were common features in the interview narratives. But very different contexts were addressed, including the legal status alongside broad societal acceptance and acceptance experienced in the close social environment. In the following, we will examine Axel Honneth's approach to recognition, as he specifically addresses the recognition in three different spheres as the conditions for the fulfilment of the individual. Because of this, it seems a compelling theoretical approach for the formulation of how recognition can be understood in the case of gay and lesbian identities, and will in the following be spelled out and critically examined in further depth. In chapter 6, the critical reading of Honneth will serve as a background for the analysis of broad normative shifts in the construction of lesbian and gay identities.

5.3.3. Honneth: recognition as love, law and solidarity

Axel Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition* (*Kampf um Anerkennung*, 1994)⁸⁵ grasps the idea of the different spheres in which such recognition is crucial: in the intimate, the legal and the social realm. He uses the concept of recognition as the foundation for his contemporary reformulation of Hegel's early work and sees intersubjective forms of recognition as the baseline for a social theory that explains the position of the individual in state and society.⁸⁶ His approach to recognition offers a major source for an understanding of the process of social change as it is the object of this study, particularly because of the different spheres it proposes. It leaves sufficient space to take identity construction as in the identity management perspective into account, as well as a broad view of different social environments, from the intimate to the abstract, that forge identity in an inter-subjective dynamic. It takes the complexity of identity formation in multifaceted social environments as the core of the analysis, where three degrees of recognition are distinguished between: love, right and solidarity.

In this study, Axel Honneth's definition of three spheres of recognition is appropriated in a specific reading that seems useful for this case. To avoid misunderstandings, it will be necessary briefly to explicit this reading. A critical understanding of what recognition implies in love, law and solidarity calls for a reference to an underlying normative framework of egalitarian principles, autonomy, equality and impartiality.⁸⁷ It will thus be argued that a liberal, autonomy-based conception of social interaction has to be regarded as being *prior* to the recognition mechanisms which Honneth identifies. While Honneth largely acknowledges the role of egalitarian modern norms in his theory, it will be argued that the impact of this concession on the theory as a whole is understated. Three levels can be distinguished between here: 1) the inter-subjective level as an understanding of human self-construction, 2) the value-frame that bases social norms on equal autonomy (mutual and equal respect, reciprocity and independence), and 3) forms of recognition in intimate, legal and broad social contexts

⁸⁵ Honneth (1994), *Kampf um Anerkennung*

⁸⁶ In Honneth's early work, it seems that there is no clear distinction made between two different conceptual uses of recognition. Honneth indeed in more recent work stresses a view on recognition that sees it at the foundational level of understanding human existence. The identification with another human being, in whom we are recognized, is for him the basis for identity as such, prior to both cognition and value. This view, while highly valuable in a foundational inquiry needs to be parenthesized here, and recognition rather understood as a posteriori notion of an inter-subjective interplay within a constituted society.

⁸⁷ Particularly for the third sphere, this reading will leave out the concept of 'performance' ('Leistung'). While this partly distorts and oversimplifies Axel Honneth's ideas, it seems sufficient for the point I want to make in this thesis.

that derive from this frame. It is therefore in the context of an egalitarian liberal normative framework that the meaning of recognition in Honneth's theory can be applied to the research question posed.

Three spheres of recognition

How does Honneth account for the three spheres of recognition that the individual experiences, in love, law and solidarity?

Love

Based on Mead's and Hegel's conceptions of self-constitution through intimate love relationships, Honneth sees love, i.e. first the mutual affection between mother and child, but then between lovers or friends as the fundamental basis of "autonomous participation in social life".⁸⁸ As the primary form of social life, love has the dual function of symbiosis and individuation, as most clearly exemplified by the mother-child relationship that is central to his argument.⁸⁹ It is the trust in a stable affection that allows for the possibility of independence and autonomous self-constitution through the supporting acknowledgement of the loving person.⁹⁰

While the affectionate basis for social existence seems intuitively compelling, it seems reasonable to doubt an isomorphic parallel between mother-child relationships, friendship, sexual relationships and various notions of partnership, in each of which Honneth depicts a moment of symbiosis: nostalgic pre-birth memory, deep conversation between friends or sexual union.⁹¹ If sexual union is the key element of symbiosis for the erotic relationship, how can it be translated into deep conversation, and why can this kind of conversation not simply be another key element of recognition also within the erotic relationship? Moreover, the relevance of mutuality in these intimate relationships seems to vary. Cannot both friendships and erotic relationships show different degrees of mutuality rather than being necessarily mutual as Honneth claims⁹² without losing the attribute 'love' or 'loving'? It can be doubted that mutual support for autonomy (for the partner, the friend or the child) are always a

⁸⁸ A. Honneth (1994), *Kampf um Anerkennung*: 174. Original: "autonome Teilnahme am öffentlichen Leben"

⁸⁹ Ibid: 158-169

⁹⁰ Ibid: 173

⁹¹ Ibid: 169f

⁹² Ibid: 173

necessary characteristics of successful (love) relationships. Overall, the suspicion arises that Honneth's description of recognition in intimate relationships is one that is closely linked to a specific contemporary (modern) understanding of sentimental life. In other words, one could argue that a (possibly liberal bourgeois) ideal of private life underlies the understanding of inter-subjective needs in this section, with the role of the mother in childhood, followed by a lasting erotic partnership that grants each other autonomous self-constitution, and a limited number of 'good friends'.

To a certain extent then, it would seem that the characterisation of Honneth's *recognition in love relationships* is biased in favour of a certain liberal view of social relationships in their attempt to create autonomy through mutual support, or towards certain (morally or psychoanalytically argued) views on sexuality (e.g. in Honneth's mentioning of sado-masochism as deviant through its failure to reciprocate⁹³), or in discarding relationships characterized by role status (such as in gendered understandings of marriage, for example).

However, one way of going beyond this would be to see these descriptions as examples of the importance of an intimate social environment, where various modes of recognition supply 'sentimental stability' and 'affective confidence'. Such a more general view would allow for the diverse patterns of partnership, intimacy and family that were reviewed in chapter 4 as characterizing lesbian and gay intimacy. The important role played by intimacy, family and friends is as compelling as it is unsurprising as a fundamental basis for self-constitution. The element of mutuality, however, seems to be introduced as an understanding of what values *should* guide this social intimacy: reciprocity rather than hierarchy, autonomy rather than dependence. 'Love', one could say, forms the basis for self-constitution as a social being, where one is recognized by others as a person who holds a certain position in social interaction. Mutuality on the basis of independence and equality thus seem to be normative aspects that we would generally attach to the social formation of self-construction.

It is interesting that whilst precisely this point, differentiating between a universally behavioural versus a specifically modern normative one, remains unmentioned by Honneth in the context of love, it is acknowledged and elaborated by Honneth himself under the second form of recognition, namely law, to which I will now turn.

⁹³ Ibid: 171: "Destortion of the love relationship" ("Verzerrung des Liebesverhältnisses")

Honneth draws on Mead to argue that Hegel's understanding of law as mutual recognition fails to acknowledge the historicity of its normative content.⁹⁴

As long as the legitimate claims of the individual have not yet been filled with the universalist principles of a universalist, post-conventional morality, they in fact only consist of the concessions that he is being accorded because of his status as a member of a specific community.⁹⁵

In Honneth's analysis, it is with the advent of modernity that a split occurs between the legal status and the social position of a person.⁹⁶ Hence, while (traditional) law initially refers to rights and duties being accorded to a person whereby she acquires a certain status within society,⁹⁷ modern legal systems are based on universal egalitarian principles from which privileges and exceptions have been banned.⁹⁸ Rights to personal freedoms, civic participation and welfare form the basis of self-respect where the recognition as a bearer of rights allows for direct procedural access to socially accepted claims. This is assured through the formal and public character of law.⁹⁹ He cites Joel Feinberg in arguing that the certainty of access to a legal system of equal rights implies a fundamental experience of self-respect as an equal member of society: "Having rights enables us to 'stand up like men', to look others in the eye, and to feel in some fundamental way the equal of anyone."¹⁰⁰ In contrast, the denial of (equal) rights undermines self-respect.¹⁰¹

However, the social status, which had previously been incorporated into or at least addressed within traditional legal systems of privileges and social roles, is not fully reduced to the (modern) universalist egalitarian understanding of 'respect' that views a person as a "aim" in line with Kantian moral thought. Instead, the notion of respect is regarded as split between 1) formal legal respect and 2) an evaluative form of social respect.¹⁰² The first is bound to the acknowledgment of the person as a moral agent in a legal system, the second is the result of an

⁹⁴ Ibid: 177

⁹⁵ Ibid: 176. Original: "Solange die legitimen Ansprüche des Einzelnen noch nicht mit den universalistischen Prinzipien einer postkonventionellen Moral aufgeladen sind, bestehen sie im Prinzip nur aus den Befugnissen, die ihm kraft seines Status als Mitglied eines konkreten Gemeinwesens zufallen."

⁹⁶ Ibid, see for example p. 187

⁹⁷ Ibid: 176

⁹⁸ Ibid: 187

⁹⁹ Ibid: 194

¹⁰⁰ J. Feinberg cited *ibid*: 194

¹⁰¹ Ibid: 194ff

¹⁰² Ibid: 179f; Rudolph von Ihering, p. 181f; Stephen Darwall.

evaluation of properties and capacities.¹⁰³ This latter understanding will be elaborated upon in the third sphere of recognition.

Honneth points out that the individual rights that define legal respect cannot be regarded as stable, but rather as dependent on the interpretation of the conditions and the scope of individual (autonomous) moral agency.¹⁰⁴ An extension of individual rights such as participative rights or welfare rights thereby constitutes a "struggle for recognition" over the understanding of conditions and scope of (autonomous) moral agency.¹⁰⁵ Historically, this struggle refers to both the inclusion of previously excluded or discriminated groups (abolition of slavery and apartheid, equal rights for women and men) and the incorporation of new contents to the understanding of egalitarian individual rights (political participation, welfare). Honneth gives the example of the civil rights movement in the US of the 1950s and 60s. We can easily see how the incorporation of an equality discourse into the argument in favour of same-sex marriage, as analysed in chapter 4, can be understood here in similar terms.

In this view, the unstable interpretation over what a system of equal rights should entail points to a certain degree of continuity between a non-egalitarian system of rights and modern egalitarian law. While the fundamental frame of reference has been transformed from being one of role attribution towards being one that entails an equal access to universal rights, imbalances, privileges and unequal access to the legal system remain present and to varying degrees important. The exclusion of women or blacks, for example, constitutes obvious historical examples of imbalances that have been firmly in place for a long time despite the egalitarian ethos. While these inequalities of rights are now finally regarded as abhorrent, one can hardly regard legal equality as having been fully accomplished on all levels. In contemporary societies, the status given to "illegal" immigrants, the social and financial obstacles to accessing court procedures, and the implicit or explicit privileges accorded to certain life choices or cultural frameworks can be given as examples for the ongoing "struggle" for equal rights within the egalitarian understanding of society.¹⁰⁶ From here, the question remains open as to whether the role of law in recognition is *fundamentally* different in a system based on equal rights or whether one should rather speak of a *gradual* difference

¹⁰³ Ibid: 183. Original: "gradueller Bewertung konkreter Eigenschaften und Fähigkeiten"

¹⁰⁴ Ibid: 185f

¹⁰⁵ Ibid: 186

¹⁰⁶ Ibid: 216. "The experience of the denial of right is measured [...] not only with the degree of universalisation, but also in the material scope of the institutionally granted rights." ("die Erfahrung der Entrechtung bemisst sich

where the self-respect experienced through legal status varies in degrees. For example, for an individual, in evaluating the notion of “to standing up as a man, looking others in the eye”, is it the abstract notion of equal rights that is decisive, or – instead – the practical access to the enforcement of certain rights that are directly available, whether equal or not? This question is one that is addressed in the equality discourses on same-sex partnerships: to what extent can we speak of full recognition if rights are accorded but not on exactly the same level as for others? Is a small differentiation operated in the law a small deficit in the experience of “being on a par” or does it undermine the experience of being a full member of society altogether? Some of the discourses we have seen suggest this latter view (the *Pacs* as “crumbs thrown to a dog” for Léa, and the *Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft* as “all rubbish” for Monika). Irrespective of the question as to how egalitarian a present day legal system is and how inegalitarian certain aspects of it can be, a crucial aspect of such an analysis is that justifications are framed according to a universal principle on the discursive level.

A person’s status as an equal bearer of rights is in this sense one element of the legal recognition that is accompanied by actual rights in their material sense (hence also their accessibility). This aspect is important in considering the validity of Honneth’s theory as either bound to one kind of (modern) society, and hence based in a specific socio-historical context, or as a general inter-subjective analysis of individual self-construction as a member of society. If the latter were claimed to be the case, then legal recognition could also refer to a system of law other than that of the modern legal system, which can be understood as being placed in a continuum of different degrees of recognition for the bearers of rights.

The split between the legal and the social forms of recognition as being inherent to modernity, as Honneth claims, can be questioned on two grounds. First, while (traditional) non-egalitarian law can reflect social status, the figure of the judge has nevertheless (also in non-egalitarian legal systems) a function that can be differentiated from the social standing of the person. Second, in contemporary social claims and in the analysis of the social acceptance of different groups of society, legal and social recognition seem importantly linked, such as in claims to affirmative action, laws against racial or homophobic prejudice etc.¹⁰⁷ We will turn to the

[...] stets nicht nur an dem Grad der Universalisierung, sondern auch an dem materialen Umfang der institutionell verbürgten Rechte.”)

¹⁰⁷ Honneth refers to the defence of human dignity in modern law as an element of social esteem that can be found in legal recognition; he notes however that “[it has] remained unclear to the present day [...], which practical legal consequences should actually accompany it.” (“[es ist] bis heute unklar geblieben [...], welche praktischen Rechtsfolgen damit tatsächlich verknüpft sein sollen.”) (Ibid: 203)

social functions of the law in chapter 6, where it will be seen how the law governing same-sex couples can become an inherently *social* reference in identity construction as providing a readily available image – sometimes on the same level as media images such as those presented on TV or in Hollywood films. However, before establishing the interconnections between these two, I shall turn to the third sphere of recognition: that is, social recognition as solidarity.

Solidarity

Beyond love in primary relationships and law, Honneth refers to a third sphere: a social recognition as the sphere where individuals experience the "esteem" for or "positive evaluation" ("Wertschätzung") of their achievements and personal characteristics. This sphere is equally characterized by the split between equality on the one hand, and distinct social positions on the other. As in the case of legal recognition, Honneth notes that social expectations have shifted from a status-defined form of recognition to a horizontal, pluralist one.¹⁰⁸ According to Honneth, the evaluation of life-achievements and ways of life can no longer be regarded as given, fixed or objective in post-conventional societies.¹⁰⁹ Instead, the individual is placed not only in a social contest for esteem and prestige, but most importantly also in the contest for the criteria and values that determine it: "Only now, the subject enters the battleground of social esteem in its full life-historical individuated size."¹¹⁰ With this historical shift, the social esteem that is attributed to the individual also becomes more restricted. Notions such as integrity and honour retreat to a "privatised" form of self-identification.¹¹¹ Instead, the concept of individual "performance" ("Leistung") in working towards "abstractly defined goals" ("abstract definierte Ziele"¹¹²) becomes the universally available trigger for social esteem.

This abstraction is closely connected to a liberal value frame. Honneth specifically points to performance and pluralism ("open horizon of plural values"¹¹³) as two possible abstract goals of either an individualist value of economic performance or an autonomy-based assessment ("Wertschätzung") of a plurality of choices. As a broad liberal value horizon, the abstract

¹⁰⁸ Ibid: 198ff

¹⁰⁹ Ibid: 202

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 202. Original: "Nunmehr erst tritt das Subjekt als seine lebensgeschichtlich individuierte Größe in das umkämpfte Feld der sozialen Wertschätzung ein."

¹¹¹ Ibid: 204

¹¹² Ibid

goals constitute the stage for a contest over the different interpretations of their concrete application. This struggle, to use Honneth's metaphor, is one over the interpretations of the concrete implications of the frame values:

The frame ideas provide so little of a generally valid system of reference in which the social value of specific attributes or capacities could be measured in such a way that they always have to be made concrete through additional cultural interpretations of it, in order to find an application in this sphere of recognition.¹¹⁴

In the modern context, the values that determine social recognition are therefore to be understood on two levels. The "frame values" in Honneth's theory can be seen as the rules of the game, which are apparently accepted by all those entering the contest. The contest itself is one over "interpretation", to the extent that concrete values and forms of life are seen in the light of their implications for general (and generally accepted, it seems) social aims:

In modern societies, the parameters of social esteem are dependent on a permanent fight, in which the different groups try with all means of symbolic violence, to increase the value of the capacities that are associated with their lifestyle with reference to the general goals.¹¹⁵

Social esteem is thus "a perceived trust [...] in achieving outcomes or possessing capacities that are recognized as 'valuable' by other members of society."¹¹⁶ Recognition through solidarity means "to experience oneself in all one's performances and capacities as valuable for society."¹¹⁷

In this sense, Honneth's concept of a struggle for social esteem bridges the gap between a collective ethical "horizon" ("abstract horizon of ethical values"/"abstrakten Horizont von ethischen Werten") on the one hand, and "most diverse aims of life" ("verschiedenste Lebensziele") on the other. Unlike in liberal neutrality, for example, the latter are not kept in a zone of non-interference but are instead "fought out" at the centre of society in a struggle that

¹¹³ Ibid: 205. Original: "offener Horizont pluraler Werte"

¹¹⁴ Ibidem. Original: "Die abstrakt gewordenen Leitideen geben so wenig schon ein allgemeingültiges Bezugssystem ab, in dem der soziale Wert bestimmter Eigenschaften und Fähigkeiten zu messen wäre, daß sie erst immer durch kulturelle Zusatzdeutungen konkretisiert werden müssen, um Anwendung in dieser Sphäre der Anerkennung zu finden"

¹¹⁵ Ibid: 205f. Original: "Die Verhältnisse der sozialen Wertschätzung unterliegen in modernen Gesellschaften einem permanenten Kampf, in dem die verschiedenen Gruppen mit den Mitteln symbolischer Gewalt versuchen, unter Bezug auf die allgemeinen Zielsetzungen den Wert der mit ihrer Lebensweise verknüpften Fähigkeiten anzuheben."

¹¹⁶ Ibid: 209. Original: "ein gefühlsmäßiges Vertrauen darin ..., Leistungen zu erbringen oder Fähigkeiten zu besitzen, die von den übrigen Gesellschaftsmitgliedern als 'wertvoll' anerkannt werden."

¹¹⁷ Ibid: 210. Original: "sich in seinen eigenen Leistungen und Fähigkeiten als wertvoll für die Gesellschaft zu erfahren."

forms an inclusive dialogue concerning social life.¹¹⁸ Such a struggle is directly reflected in the discourses we have encountered concerning marriage and partnership: similar value horizons are evoked to argue for different aims and concrete life choices: values of choice, equality, reciprocity and commitment constituted a broad horizon. However, they were employed for the discursive justification of different "aims of life", as was shown in the diversity of "life projects" or "life plans" as we have mostly presented it.

The following section will attempt to evaluate the concepts of three spheres of recognition in the light of the aims that an inter-subjective social theory such as Honneth's implies at its outset.

General patterns of behaviour, abstract values and concrete norms

The main problem in Honneth's social theory as based on recognition is the definition of an inter-subjective frame for an individual's self-realisation which would not reproduce a normative, moral frame that is linked to a socio-historical ethical view on how people should live their lives. This is however Honneth's argument in Struggle for Recognition:

The specifications we are looking for therefore need to be so formal or abstract as to not raise the suspicion of being simply derivatives of concrete interpretations of the good life; at the same time, however, they also need to be so material and substantial so that through them more can be learnt about the conditions of self-fulfilment than is being said with the Kantian reference to individual autonomy.¹¹⁹

On the basis of what we have said, it could be argued that Honneth fails to achieve such a theory that would abstract from a concrete socio-historical definition of norms.¹²⁰ His theory is closely related to a normative sense of "interpretations of the good life" from the very start, at least as they are formulated. Honneth places the individual in a situation of liberal choice within a restricted "horizon of values" ("Wertehorizont").¹²¹ In this, his normative framework goes beyond even that of a neo-Kantian thinker such as Rawls: Honneth indeed claims that a

¹¹⁸ Even though it remains an open question what role the state plays here; to a certain extent both (social) struggle and (state) neutrality could be seen as compatible if the contest is seen as a civil one.

¹¹⁹ Ibid: 277. Original: "Die gesuchten Bestimmungen müssen daher so formal oder abstrakt sein, daß sie gerade nicht den Verdacht erwecken, bloß die Ablagerungen von konkreten Interpretationen des guten Lebens darzustellen; andererseits aber müssen sie auch wiederum material oder inhaltlich so gefüllt sein, daß mit ihrer Hilfe mehr über die Bedingungen der Selbstverwirklichung zu erfahren ist, als uns mit dem kantischen Hinweis auf die individuelle Autonomie gegeben ist."

¹²⁰ One can note here that Honneth criticises Hegel precisely for having reproduced the "historical prejudice of his era" in his social theory - it is not clear why this would not be the case for his own contemporary adaptation. Ibid: 281. Original: "die historischen Vorurteile der jeweiligen Epoche auf problematische Weise eingeflossen"

¹²¹ Ibid: 284

liberal understanding of autonomous self-constitution is fundamentally necessary not only on the legal but also on the social and intimate level. In indicating options for the good life within an autonomy-based framework, his normative position could be compared with that of liberal perfectionism, such as for example that of Joseph Raz.¹²² Secondly, Honneth's forms of recognition can be argued to be closely tied up with a concrete socio-historical set of norms and values. While the experience of recognition as established in Honneth's theory is intuitively compelling, its form and importance are tightly linked to the established norms of modern (and for certain aspects contemporary liberal) society.

At the end of his book, Honneth leaves open the question as to whether and how a shared material "modern form of ethics" that would allow for a substantive solidarity in which individuals can experience a full social valuing of their lives can be achieved.¹²³ However, besides the fact that the outlook of an unchallenged concrete post-conventional ethics seems somewhat threatening and at odds with the idea of the inevitable democratic struggle over interpretations of value frames, it becomes clear that his normative understandings, in particular the conception of autonomy, equality and reciprocity, are inherent to the recognition model, not only in its outcome, but also at its very roots. The question here is not whether we share these values - of course we do. Rather, it is necessary to clarify whether they stand at the basis of a normative conception of social interaction, or whether they can be *deduced* from social interaction and human necessities.

However, the context of the staged "struggle for recognition" over interpretations of a shared value horizon helps to analyse the trend – and ambiguities – arising from trends in contemporary society including homosexuality. Values of equality, symmetry and reciprocity help to explain a broad range of trends in the transformations such as a shifting definition of marriage more generally, choice-based partnership models, the acceptance of homosexual lifestyles, but also normalization debates around homosexuality, where partnership and commitment play a more central role. (See chapter 6)

5.3.4. Reciprocity, symmetry and equal autonomy in Honneth's recognition theory

While a distancing from specific values is attempted through a focus on inter-subjective behaviour and standards of the social self-constitution of individuals, the "general pattern of

¹²² See generally: Joseph Raz. *The Morality of Freedom*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)

behaviour" ("allgemeine Verhaltensmuster")¹²⁴ is necessarily placed in a value context that constitutes the foundation of social interaction and self-understanding beyond a mere characterisation of human nature as necessarily inter-subjective and social one. Honneth acknowledges its historical conditionality,¹²⁵ but remains largely unclear over the implications of this limitation for the validity of the results of his analysis.

As discussed above, for law and solidarity, Honneth points to the difference between the sphere of recognition as a formal structure on the one hand, and its (modern) normative content on the other. He notes that law traditionally referred to a specific status as a position in society,¹²⁶ whereas modern citizenship implies recognition as the bearer of rights among equals. A similar distinction is made for the third sphere of recognition, where Honneth sees forms of solidarity as linked to socio-historical value-frames. This distinction, however, is largely understated or denied for love, where certain (traditional) forms of 'love' recognition could arguably be seen as relating to role rather than to mutuality and the reciprocal granting of independence. Thus, overall, a solid defence of liberal egalitarian values is implied in all three spheres of Honneth's theory.

One answer to this problem is, of course, to consider inter-subjective human necessities being themselves located within a context of norms. Hence, social theories can only understand the social interaction that is typical of a specific type of society. As an example, one could say that the denial of the right to go hunting can be essentially demeaning in a tribal society, whereas a forced tattoo-mutilation would not be, whereas the opposite would be true of our society. It is obvious that Honneth does not speak of distant social contexts such as tribal societies. However, the fact that his understanding of the role of recognition clearly implies specific needs for reciprocity and equal autonomy has a strong impact on what can be said on a purely inter-subjective level of analysis. We thereby risk losing the claim of going beyond the (however valuable) descriptive analysis of a geographically and historically normative context and the individual experience thereof in individual self-construction.

A second answer would be to limit the scope of what can be said about the abstract (non-specific) necessities of inter-subjective self-construction to a general understanding of men as

¹²³ Honneth (1994), *Kampf um Anerkennung*: 287

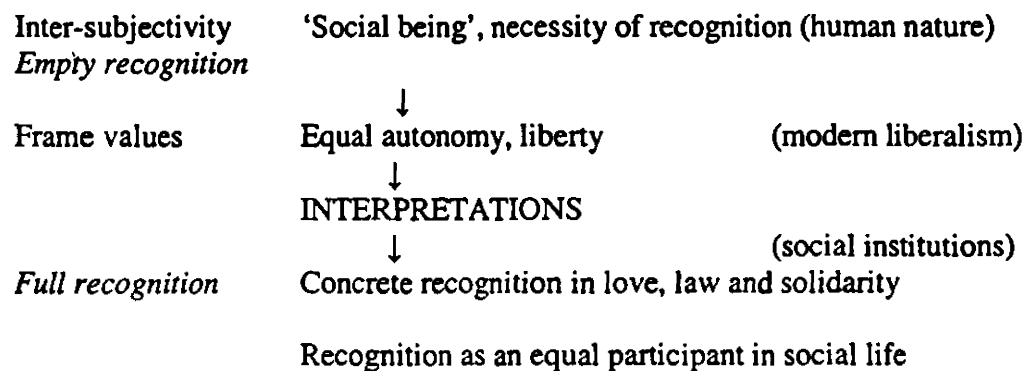
¹²⁴ Ibid: 279

¹²⁵ Ibid: 280

¹²⁶ Ibid, e.g., p. 176f

social beings. Where human nature requires interaction and communication, a pre-normative level of inter-subjectivity can be defined. Recognition could be part of this level, but understood as empty of content. A person would be recognized purely as a social actor as such. This level, however, immediately calls for a normative framework, where framing values, such as equality and autonomy, give meaning to interaction and mutual recognition. Here, however, the second cannot then logically be *derived* from the first. The value framework in which Honneth's form of intersubjectivity is placed is thus that of symmetry and equal autonomy.

If we adopt this latter interpretation of Honneth's theory, recognition becomes a twofold element: a pre-normative 'empty' one, and a 'full', specific 'symmetric' one that implies an egalitarian liberal value frame. 'Full' recognition can thus only occur through the intimate, legal or social interpretations and actualizations of the value frame.



In this reading of Honneth, the level that looks at human nature in general remains an empty form of recognition, in that it only has an abstract meaning. Full recognition, on the other hand occurs as a consequence of concrete interpretations of the frame values that are interpreted and implemented in social and legal institutions. It is only on that level, provided that such interpretations are meaningfully applied to all spheres of social life, that the individual can achieve a fulfilled status of being an equal participant in social life. This social process however functions interactively: concrete ways of life in turn influence frame goals and their interpretations: the role of affirmed homosexual lifestyles and their influence on society more broadly speaking, as has been suggested, can be read in this light. The linkages of interaction, concrete ways of life and frame goals can thus be seen as circular, where the procedural element of inter-subjectivity is stressed:

the important point here is that in establishing a defence of values such as equality and autonomy, Honneth's analysis helps to show the multidimensional functions that these values have in the self-construction of the individual in society. It is precisely this complexity of equal recognition that is at stake in the discussion of same-sex partnership, where normative perspectives are strongly linked with personal love relationships and the social positioning of the individual in relation to her identity and choices. In the interviews, as we have seen, as far as the meaning that these forms of recognition have for the individual are concerned, the normative elements are intermingled with narratives on personal fulfilment in love relationships and the positioning in both the direct social environment and abstract notions of society.

While Honneth's three spheres of recognition constitute a promising explanatory framework for the inquiry over the meaning of recognition in the field, the restrictions on his theory which we have elaborated here need to be taken on board. For an analysis of contemporary social and legal developments, this means that requirements for the recognition as full members of society will be closely linked to normative discourses which interpret the values of equality, autonomy and reciprocity in specific social conditions. Moreover however, the more precise norms involved in the recognition of same-sex partnerships enable us to cast a further light on the advantages and problems of recognition as a concept. In looking at lesbian and gay lives and the debates on their positioning in society, normative discourses of legal and social partnership norms in personal life, law and society at large, can thereby provide an overarching rationale for the study of the recognition of same-sex couples in a perspective that centres on the individual.

5.3.5. The recognition of same-sex couples: the justice approach

How is the focus on egalitarian values in Honneth's conception of recognition linked to the philosophical debate on same-sex couples and homosexuality? And how can the normative context of the "equality" discourse in the interviews and in the liberal egalitarian philosophical approaches to the question be reconnected and repositioned in the context of Honneth's framework? Nancy Fraser's theory of misrecognition provides a potential route that will be explored in this light. It will, however, be argued that a more dynamic theory needs to be

¹²⁹ Ibid: 26

provided that accounts for social change at the more fundamental level of how identities are conceived.

The question of how one is recognized has provided a valuable political argument through which a better understanding can be established concerning what is at stake for lesbian and gay identities in this debate. To avoid any misunderstanding, where the opening up of partnership institutions has occurred, i.e. through the recognition of same-sex couples, it has surely shaken up societies in a beneficial way. For the individual lesbian and gay it has opened up some spaces where before there were constraints. But the further the political debate, which was often strategic (for the better) or polemical (for the worst), is left behind - and this, to be sure can in the near future only occur with reference to a handful of countries - the more the focus of analysis will have to return to the norms that are implied in the important social changes that are connected to the opening up of partnership institutions to same-sex couples. Indeed, with what some have called "banalisation" (in France) and "normalization" (see chapter 6), such debates have arisen to an important degree within what could be called a gay and lesbian academic community. Often, identity has been too easily invoked by the political claim for same-sex marriage. Beneath the concept of identity, we have to look at the values through which it is constructed, and rather than being recognized through same-sex marriage, lesbian and gay identities are individually *constructed* through the values of society, and probably differently so in one where same-sex partnership has reached a high level of esteem. Therefore, the recognition of same-sex couples does not constitute the recognition of lesbians and gays but instead the recognition of particular values (that are in turn constitutive elements of individuals' identities).

Let us return to the use of recognition as a concept in the homosexuality debate. In the liberal tradition, the case of homosexuality has recurrently appeared as a key example, roughly speaking from Jeremy Bentham to Thomas Nagel.¹³⁰ From being a perfect example for liberal toleration, it has more recently served as a paradigm for appropriating the concept of recognition in a liberal context. Here, I propose to take Anna Elisabetta Galeotti's defence of a liberal use of recognition as an example to illustrate this point.¹³¹ In her very useful analysis

¹³⁰ See e.g. Thomas Nagel. "Concealment and Exposure." (*Philosophy and Public Affairs*, issue 27, 1998)

¹³¹ Anna Elisabetta Galeotti. "Toleration as Recognition: The case for same-sex marriage." Presented at George Washington University 2001 on "Toleration and Identity." The page numbers refer to the online version www.gay.it/noi/view.php?ID=12516. See also Galeotti (2002), *Toleration as recognition*.

she works on grounding recognition in liberalism, naming it "toleration as recognition", and gives same-sex marriage as an example:

[Toleration as recognition] is aimed at making the public presence of minorities' differences fully legitimate and on an equal footing with majority's characters. But once minority identities have become legitimately visible in the public space, then social standards and conventions exclusively patterned after majority's characters and traditions need revision so as to make room for the newly admitted identities. The redrawing of social standards constitutes the implication of toleration as recognition, which, in the case of gays and lesbians, requires a redefinition of the main locus of intimate life and relationship, the family. Same-sex marriage represents a paradigmatic example of what toleration as recognition implies concerning social standards and public conventions.¹³²

There are firm reasons why the case of same-sex marriage constitutes a paradigm, as we briefly mentioned above. The notion of identity as related to lesbians and gays falls outside the communitarian view of a closed cultural context, as it somehow seems more evident that a gay and a lesbian is always necessarily also something else – in contrast to an stereotypical view of ethnic communities. This is logically grounded in the fact that homosexuality is not "passed on" through a close-knit cultural context within families. Yet it still falls under the concept of unchosen inequality, because it is agreed to be imposed on the individual (genetically or through certain factors in socialisation or both) and is not a chosen form of how to live her sexuality (even though this can of course be challenged). Furthermore, while it is related to something inherently private (sexuality), it can potentially be institutionalized as public (marriage).

Galeotti's view of identity goes beyond a static view of identities, and it is in the liberal context that the proposed link between identity and recognition is interesting. She defends the notion of "toleration as recognition" against a traditional concept of liberal toleration as public blindness. While liberal toleration relies on the public/private divide to accommodate for universalism and difference, her understanding of toleration as recognition implies a "symbolic act" that contributes to the "empowerment of different individuals as equals".¹³³ In contrast to arguments for same-sex marriage that are essentially based on non-discrimination alone,¹³⁴ the motivation behind her claim for recognition allows for the articulation of social isolation, informal discriminations and frustrations of self-expression in the public sphere more generally into account. It also goes beyond a definition of affirmative politics that aims at reinstalling equality of chances through a statistical approach. The compelling element of

¹³² Ibid: 1

¹³³ Ibid: 18

¹³⁴ See for example Wedgwood (1999), "The Fundamental Argument"

the argument is that it seems right to do something for marginal social groups. The problem is, however, that recognition as a concept of how to respond to this sort of inequality does not make explicit which part of the identity should be recognized nor how much more than formal equality is required on the level of the state.

The view of addressing the position of marginal groups in turn links in with Nancy Fraser's notion of redressing "misrecognition".¹³⁵ She also refers to same-sex couples as a paradigm for the concept of recognition. In contrast to Galeotti's analysis, Fraser focuses more on Honneth's ideas on recognition than most liberal thinkers who have examined the topic from a philosophical perspective. She explains that one should not think of collective identities as being something pure or fixed.¹³⁶ But for "heuristic purposes", she sees lesbians' and gays' despised sexuality as "approximating the ideal type" of cultural misrecognition (as the second form of misrecognition next to economic injustices).¹³⁷

[T]heir mode of collectivity is that of a despised sexuality, rooted in the cultural-evaluational structure of society. From this perspective, the injustice they suffer is quintessentially a matter of recognition. Gays and lesbians suffer from heterosexism: the authoritative construction of norms that privilege heterosexuality. Along with this goes homophobia: the cultural devaluation of homosexuality.¹³⁸

In her article "Rethinking recognition",¹³⁹ Nancy Fraser defines recognition as "status recognition" that distances itself from both a communitarian model of identity politics and from a class politics model that would link cultural identity back to economic inequalities. What should be recognized then, first and foremost, is an existing discrimination.¹⁴⁰

In a broader picture, therefore, social justice as "participatory parity" can be separated into recognition (cultural) and distribution (of resources). The problem of recognition is addressed as that of 'misrecognition' while that of distribution is that of 'maldistribution'. Both misrecognition and maldistributions are violations of a parity of participation in social life.

¹³⁵ Nancy Fraser (1995), "From Redistribution to Recognition." See also for example: Fraser (2002), "Recognition without Ethics?"

¹³⁶ "Once again, we may doubt whether there exist any pure collectivities of this sort." Nancy Fraser (1995), "From Redistribution to Recognition": 76

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid: 77.

¹³⁹ Nancy Fraser (2000), "Rethinking Recognition": 107-120.

¹⁴⁰ See also Didier and Eric Fassin's restatement of this idea in Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin. "Eloge de la complexité." Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin (eds.) *De la question sociale à la question raciale? Représenter la société française*. (Paris: La Découverte, 2006: 249-259)

She calls her model of recognition 'status model'. Fraser's approach looks at the individual and her status as a participant in social interaction.

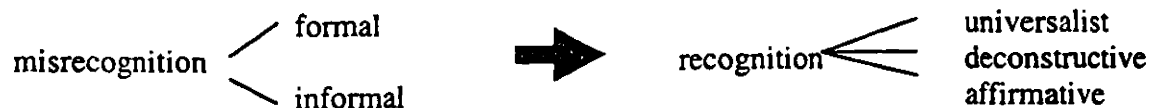
From this perspective, what requires recognition is not the group-specific identity but the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction. [...] If and when such patterns constitute actors as peers, capable of participating on a par with one another in social life, then we can speak of reciprocal recognition and status equality.¹⁴¹

The individual-based approach to recognition is not new: we should not look at the group identity, but instead at the injustice that the individual suffers. The difference to classical liberal approaches lies in the participatory idea: to ensure justice, the individual has to be lifted right into the centre of society, and for this purpose we should screen for all possible defects (misrecognition, maldistribution). Fraser stresses that this model allows for addressing maldistribution without seeing it as a subcategory of cultural recognition or, on the contrary, as the meta-structure of social justice. Her rejection of group identities in what she calls the 'reification of identity'¹⁴² sees an identity model as potentially leading to conformism, intolerance and patriarchy.

As we have seen, there are clear parallels in Galeotti's and Fraser's approaches to recognition, where both combine legal and social elements of injustices that can be addressed through affirmative recognition. Both make it clear that social and legal factors cannot be seen as separate neither in detecting nor in remedying misrecognition:

In some cases, misrecognition is institutionalized via government policies, administrative codes or professional practice. It can also be institutionalized informally-in associational patterns, long-standing costumes or sedimented social practices of civil society. (p. 114)

Misrecognition thus has various grounds and a multitude of remedies, that can be put as follows:



Fraser contributes important arguments to the recognition debate and includes the value shifts linked to counter social misrecognition:

¹⁴¹ Nancy Fraser (2000), "Rethinking Recognition": 113

¹⁴² Ibid: 112

Redressing misrecognition now means changing social institutions - or, more specifically, changing the interaction-regulating values that impede parity of participation at all relevant institutional sites.¹⁴³

In contrast to communitarian approaches, recognition then consists of affirmative policies that help to counter misrecognition of marginalized groups in society:

Thus, unlike the identity model, it does not accord an a priori privilege to approaches that valorize group specificity. Rather, it allows in principle for what we call universalist recognition, and deconstructive recognition, as well as for the affirmative recognition of difference."¹⁴⁴

While I of course agree on the policy claims with which Anna Elisabetta Galeotti, Nancy Fraser various other liberal egalitarian thinkers advance, I propose a shift of attention in the recognition debate. Recognition in Nancy Fraser's terms only partly explains what value-shifts acts of recognition imply. Also, the reshaping of identity and the simultaneous misrecognition that value shifts imply are difficult to address in her theory of misrecognition.

The liberal use of recognition on the one hand, and Axel Honneth's theory of recognition on the other, come from different angles (but are often accommodated with one another and increasingly so). However, a common trait is precisely that of underestimating the normative aspect of what is being said: in focusing on the recognition of an individual, both in an inter-subjective system and in a liberal political philosophy, the question remains: the recognition (or misrecognition) of what? Fraser's apparent answer, as we have seen, is that it is the recognition of "misrecognition" that we should aim for. But this answer simply seems to beg the question if we do not say why the (cultural) non-recognition, e.g. of certain choices, should be conceived of as misrecognition. It is always only a part of an individual that can be recognized, and choosing this part, rather than being a focus on the human being as such, constitutes a normative choice of what values are accorded this recognition. Recognition as a "symbolic act" (Galeotti) or as "parity of participation" (Fraser) only has a meaning through importing of a set of values that we consider as being linked to the identities in question. What is being recognized are values, not people themselves.

The recognition of same-sex couples should therefore be viewed in the context of normative transformations, as they are being analyzed in this study. Lesbian and gay identity is shaped in the context of the value system the individual finds herself in, and far too little attention has

¹⁴³ Ibid: 115

¹⁴⁴ Ibid: 116

been paid to the meaning that forms of recognition has for lesbians and gays themselves. Rather than representing the recognition of their identities as such, shifting legal and social norms on partnership and the management of public identities (see chapter 6) have opened up different spaces for the construction of public identities that are used and appropriated in very different ways.

To briefly exemplify the shifts implied, the following norms have been strengthened through the legal recognition of same-sex couples and the public debates they have implied: One could argue that on the personal emotional level, conjugality has become a central norm; on the legal level, non-discrimination has become central (as opposed to 'public order' policies); and on the social level, the raising of partnership to a public status and the norm of openness and coherence have increasingly imposed themselves in various areas of life.

This structure of classifying the underlying norms in the social change that the recognition of same-sex couples implies also helps us to structure the arguments that have been made *against* it. The feminist and libertarian critique for example focuses on the norm of conjugality for what it implies in society. The conservative critique focuses on non-discrimination, as the principle of non-discrimination implies the impossibility of public order policies, i.e. proposing for example how a family should be structured. The liberal conservative critique focuses on the public status of partnership, where the idea is that what happens in my bedroom is not a matter of public policies (as a "private garden" in Christophe's metaphor).

Critiques of same-sex marriage

Love: conjugality: in the feminist critique

Law: equality, non-discrimination: in the conservative critique

Society: openness, public status of partnership: in the liberal conservative critique

How are these shifts related to the individual's identity? If defended on the basis of recognition (and not on procedural equality grounds) it will be argued that the acknowledgement of these values as a symbolic act or an affirmative measure will strengthen the status of gays and lesbians in society and thus compensate for any discrimination that is experienced. Of course this is not necessarily wrong. But it represents an oversimplification of what is happening. First, it is not because a person is lesbian or gay that the recognition of same-sex couples signifies an affirmative recognition of that person's identity. Second, the

shift in norms that the recognition of same-sex couples represents essentially reshapes the spaces within which identity-formation is possible and in turn influences identities rather than recognising them as such. In the latter case we do of course judge the proposed reshaping of identity as a good thing, but essentially because we defend the values that are implied in these shifts. A liberal reformulation thus stresses the values of equality and reciprocity in recognition as a desirable dynamic of social change, the dynamic element of which will be elaborated on in the analysis in chapter 6.

5.3.6. Honneth's recognition framework and its link to same-sex marriage debates

In the previous subsections, a detailed yet exemplifying discussion has been provided of the uses that have been made of the concept of recognition as relating to identities and to the political claim of same-sex marriages. Here, important linkages between Honneth's framework and the liberal "justice" perspective, as we have called it, have been made. These discussions are crucial in framing the transformations that this study analyzes on the level of the individual. The idea of a "struggle for recognition" over the interpretation of broad frame-values helps conceptualize the changes which lesbian and gays are experiencing at the level of the state and of society. In turn, this produces insights into the very construction of lesbian and gay identities under conditions of social change. The legal recognition of same-sex couples and debates thereof both constitute an important element of this changing environment - a trigger, and a symptom.

Surely, all three spheres are involved in the question of the recognition of the same sex-couple. First, as far as love-recognition is concerned, a crucial question is the role that the legal and social framing of partnership and family has on its function as a fundamental basis of self-construction and self-consciousness. The question should be raised as to what form of partnership, or family or friendship relations understood in a broader sense can fulfil this function.

Second, as regards legal recognition, we can easily think of the often repeated argument that "restricting marriage to opposite-sex couples is a denial of *equality*".¹⁴⁵ This institutional denial is experienced as a misrecognition, in which "an institutionalised pattern of cultural

¹⁴⁵ Ralph Wedgwood (1999), "The fundamental Argument": 225. While there are various problems with the equality argument (discussed but discarded by Wedgwood), in this context it should simply be noted that respondents within this study often referred to the denial of same-sex marriage as an inequality of rights.

value constitutes some social actors as less than full members of society and prevents them from participating as peers.”¹⁴⁶

Finally, solidarity-recognition is most clearly touched by the inclusion into a shared set of values that the recognition of same-sex couples represents. The committed same-sex couple has arguably entered the collective ethical horizon of Western European societies. For other gay and lesbian lifestyles, in which a focus on couple life is rejected, this drive can be interpreted either as also approaching the ethical horizon, or instead, being further marginalized by the affirmation of the partnership norm. As a conclusion, it can be said that Honneth’s framework for recognition provides space for the various aspects that seem crucial to this study, where the approach of “Politics of recognition” appeared to be too one-sided. In chapter 6, it will allow for further more specific conclusions that link the empirical findings to the philosophical debates around the question of same-sex marriage.

At this stage at least two more points require clarification. First, how important is the legal recognition of the individual in contrast to love and social acceptance? Second, what, in contrast to certain identity-based understandings of recognition, is being recognized? These perspectives, outlined in the following two sections, will in turn be the basis for a more empirically centred analysis in chapter 6 that will provide conclusions drawn from the fieldwork concerning the main research question of what the recognition of same-sex couples means to the individual lesbian and gay person and their identity construction.

5.3.7. The role of the law and the state

Once the three spheres of Honneth’s approach have been included in the overall framework, one fundamental question concerns the role of the law. To what extent is the law linked to the individual on the one hand and to social recognition on the other? What can be said about the degree to which recognition by both law and state is important? We have already mentioned the inter-relationship between legal and social aspects of recognition throughout the empirical chapters but also in Fraser’s and Galeotti’s approaches. Using Honneth’s three spheres approach seems to indicate a preconceived answer to the question of the extent to which legal recognition matters to the individual (i.e. to put it bluntly: it matters one third?). Instead, one has to bear in mind that the very importance accorded to the state registration of partnerships

¹⁴⁶ N. Fraser (2000), “Rethinking recognition”: 114

is also determined within a social context, where sometimes the role of the state is of relatively little importance. Antonella in the following extract seems to say that, according to her, the Church would ultimately be the more relevant institution for the establishment of recognition through the blessing of partnerships:

Antonella (24, Roma)

And so, I think that civil marriage, here in Italy, is not sufficient to make things change. - You would also have to have a change from the side of the church. Because the state, yes – but a legalisation by the state only is not enough in a country like ours that is seen as, well, where you feel the influence of the church a lot.¹⁴⁷

This example in which Antonella underlines the influence of the Church as contrasted with that of the state allows us to focus on the fact that the question of what role state legislation itself has or can have for the individual and her own social environment is part of the question, and it is not settled at the outset. It may, in particular, depend both on the country and on the individual's personal cultural context.

The law and understanding oneself

A second perspective on such a role of the law can be given through the sense in which the individual can understand him- or herself as a social actor only, or mainly, through the law. In reviewing the role of law, Joseph Raz points to the inherent link between morality, social norms and law on the one hand, and the possibility for critical evaluation of law by the individual on the other.¹⁴⁸ Raz here argues that people use the law for understanding themselves and reality. Thus engaging in evaluative judgements, there is a necessary link to morality. However, this linkage is determined by the evaluative stand towards the moral authority of law and hence a possibly critical stance that integrates the understanding of the law. The following passage illustrates Raz' position here, which underlines the importance of norms in defining law, but also points to the constituent role that law plays in the creation of meaning for the individual:

The concept of law is part of our culture and of our cultural traditions. It plays a role in the way in which ordinary people as well as the legal profession understand their own and other people's actions. It is part of the way they 'conceptualize' social reality. But the culture and tradition of which the concept is a part provide it with neither sharply defined contours nor a

¹⁴⁷ Original: "E allora il matrimonio civile, secondo me, qui in Italia, no è sufficiente per fare cambiare le cose. È necessario anche un cambiamento della parte della chiesa. Perché lo Stato, sì, però una legalizzazione della parte dello stato soltanto, per un paese come il nostro che viene visto, [in cui] è sentito molto l'influenza della chiesa, non è sufficiente."

¹⁴⁸ Joseph Raz. "Authority, Law, and Morality." *Ethics in the Public Domain*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994 [1985])

clearly identifiable focus. Various, sometimes conflicting, ideas are displayed in them. It falls to legal theory to pick on those which are central and significant to the way the concept plays its role in people's understanding of society, to elaborate and explain them. [...]

Legal theory contributes in this respect to an improved understanding of society. But it would be wrong to conclude, as D. Lyons has done (Lyons 1983), that one judges the success of analysis of the concept of law by its theoretical sociological fruitfulness. To do so is to miss the point that, unlike concepts like 'mass' or 'electron', 'the law' is a concept used by people to understand themselves.¹⁴⁹

On this view, the law has a constituent role in individuals' understanding of themselves and of social reality. Rather than seeing it as one factor alongside social recognition, social actions can in Raz' view be *read* through the law. This view may overstate the role of law – for example because in reality, unlike legal philosophers such as Raz, most individuals are not even aware of the precise legal context in which they find themselves, e.g. concerning the consequences of a civil partnership. But it forms a means of understanding certain relations and forms a stable reference that individuals can draw upon: while individuals may not "know" the precise context of the law, they know that it constitutes a reference that can be looked up and form a (relatively) stable mode of legitimizing behaviour, narratives and projects. In chapter 6, the special character that can be ascribed to the law will be analyzed through the idea of validation of life plans: while *social* validation may seem unstable and is open to uncertainties, interpretation and imagination, the *legal* context is stable and (potentially) identifiable.

If the identification of legal references can be seen as relatively stable, how does social and legal change enter into the analysis?

5.3.8. *The individual and social change*

As social and legal changes are the starting point of the analysis, the question of whether the individual should be seen as the stable fix point within the framework arises. In Raz's account, as we have seen, if the individual can understand herself partly through law, the individual's identity would equally be viewed as being in transition in our case as a result of changes in the legal framework towards homosexuality. As we have seen, the question of identity and the individual should be looked at in a way that avoids an oversimplified understanding of the individual. There are two approaches towards understanding the complex relation between the individual and his or her agency. These approaches take two different and seemingly contradictory forms: 1) the first views the individual as actively creating and changing his or

her identity based on both free choice within a changing social context; identities thereby appear as more fluid, malleable and multifaceted than the model of fixed identities suggests. 2) The individual as agent does not stand independent of social norms and changing historical contingencies, both in its constitution as autonomous agent and in the choices it can and does make.

While the first point forms a contrast to the idea of a culturally defined identity approach to the individual, the second point contrasts with the view of the individual as an agent who (freely) chooses on the basis of any social norms. At the heart of Honneth's approach is a view which focuses upon the reflexivity and responsiveness which occurs between the individual and his or her inter-subjective experience in society. However, before proceeding, it is useful to clarify how this view can then be understood as regards the sociology of the individual.

In analysing the question of the intricate relationship between identity, self and autonomy, a historical approach to its changing social meaning over time. A specific view of the self can be explained through the concept of modernity. Peter Wagner analyses the shift to the unquestioned character of the individual's identity by referring to the political ideals of democratic revolutions. He argues that the view of a social and political organization that bases its legitimacy on individuals' needs and desires automatically led to the conception of individuals as stable and rational.¹⁵⁰ In a social theory approach such as Honneth's, as has been pointed out, the implications of a *political* understanding of the definition of the individual need to be singled out – or disentangled. A comprehensive analysis of what individual identity is about requires an understanding of the historicity of the social constitution of the self and the instauration of values of reciprocity and choice. To a certain extent, this study is an example of such an analysis. The process that individuals find themselves in when faced with social transformations will be the main element of chapter 6, in which we shall examine challenges to identity construction that may be seen as linked to changes in the normative context concerning homosexuality in society.

The perspective of identity management that has been developed in an empirically-driven way helps to balance both perspectives on how the individual is understood in a context of social

¹⁴⁹ Ibid: 237

¹⁵⁰ Peter Wagner. "Die Problematik der 'Identität' und die Soziologie der Moderne." Juergen Straub and Joachim Renn (eds.). *Transitorische Identität, Der Prozesscharakter des modernen Selbst*. (Frankfurt: Campus, 2002: 303-317)

change: as being constituted by societal transformations that provide references and constraints on the one hand, and as an active agent who strategically applies choices within different social settings and with different normative value frames on the other. The combination of these views is necessary in order to assess the role that the transformations under examination in this thesis play in individual lesbian and gay lives.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the interview material on the last of the five main themes addressed in the questionnaire guide: public identity. The analysis of the material allowed for concrete examples of how gay or lesbian identities were pronounced to parents or at the workplace. Distinctions have been made between the different strategies that respondents adopted. In particular the distinction has been made between cases in which conflicts arose and those where no conflict occurred. Thereafter, it was suggested that identity in different social spheres, as had become apparent in the discourses, was best described as choices which relate to identity management. Different constraints, including hostile environments and ideologies such as the wanting "privacy" or wanting to be "out", were described as constituents of such identity management. Lesbians and gays then appear to be public, private, hidden, or secret, depending on how ideology and constraints interact in the individual's strategy. This view was contrasted by a "coming out" perspective, which proves extremely useful to analyse on the discursive level, but too one-sided and flawed to be used as a concept of analysis.

These empirical findings and their interpretation help to redraw the understanding of identity in the debate on recognition. When the example of homosexuality has been referred to in political philosophy debates about the recognition of identity, it has often been argued that not sufficient account of the multifaceted character of identity has been taken. But even beyond that, it was shown that the dynamic character of normative social change as an underlying factor in the construction of identity needs to be taken into account. Axel Honneth's approach to recognition provides the possibility to include three fundamental spheres of recognition in the theoretical framework. These can be seen as directly relating to the role that the recognition of same-sex couples can play in the law, in societal acceptance, and through the impact it can have on partnerships and close social environments. As we have seen, however, Honneth's framework did not sufficiently stress the normative character it entails in being based on the values of equality and reciprocity. Rather than recognizing individuals' identities

in the three spheres as such, one should instead speak of the recognition of norms: the recognition and reinforcement of norms – as they can be expressed in the law – can then be seen as the result of a struggle over the concrete interpretation of frame norms. As a consequence, under these conditions of social change, additional constraints can be experienced in the management of identity. Recognition can thus be understood as a shifting normative context, both in the social setting in which it takes place, and within the individual's ideology and strategic choices.

The next chapter more closely combines the empirical findings with the theoretical perspectives that have been described so far. However, it will go beyond the analysis of identity and recognition that we have provided in this chapter through an analysis of the consequences of social and legal change. These transformations have been central to this research throughout and had been underlined in the "social progress" discourses by a large number of respondents (chapter four). How can their impact on the process of identity construction and the normative constraints of lesbians and gays be analysed? An interactive reading of the self-understanding of the individual and social norms will be reviewed using the social theory approach of Jean-Claude Kaufmann. In complementing Axel Honneth's conception of recognition, the social theory notion of the individual as a process as well as the role of images in the construction of identity, as laid out by Kaufmann, will establish more concrete findings allowing for a better understanding of the present transformations. As will be seen, Kaufmann refers to a more circular view of the interplay between individual and norm, and his theoretical points seem to correspond to the idea of the research project overall. From the interview material, hypotheses will be launched as to how the transformations can be read in the respondents' adaptation to a new normative context, and how they project themselves into partnership and family projects in the light of how they *experience* legal and social recognition.

Chapter VI

Recognition, social change, and the individual

In the previous chapter, the question of identity has been analysed from different angles. The uses of the concepts of identity and recognition in political philosophy and social theory were reviewed. It was necessary to formulate a framework that explained the diversified identity construction found in the interview discourses in connection to social change and the law. The empirical findings were linked to social theory readings of identity and recognition. Through this, the individual narratives presented in chapter three, from a biographical perspective, and in chapter four, from a thematic perspective through the formulation of typologies and argumentative rationales, are brought back into addressing the main research question of what the social and legal transformation and changes mean to the individual.

In this final chapter, the consequences of such an understanding of the individual in a context of normative change will be analysed. Building on the previous chapter, the emphasis is now upon how change functions for the constitution of self and the normative environment. On the one hand, the case of the changing norms concerning homosexuality can be seen as exemplifying more general insights into social theory concerning social change and identity, i.e. homosexual identity can tell us more about how to understand any kind of identity construction. On the other hand, the inquiry of this final chapter is geared towards answering the question of what the concrete impact is on lesbian and gay lifestyles. What do the changes mean to the individual who is lesbian or gay?

The first section draws upon Jean-Claude Kaufmann's sociology of the individual to outline a circular understanding of the individual and social change, which highlights the role of imagery and inter-subjectivity in the construction of the self. The idea that gays and lesbians have "changed" alongside the legal and social transformations of the past decades will be reviewed in this light. Thereafter, in 6.2, drawing on the question of what recognition means to the individual, the case of challenges to identity construction will be analysed. Examples will be given as to how new norms concerning homosexuality can challenge lesbian and gay identity management. It will be reviewed whether in certain cases experienced transformations can constitute "misrecognition" of some identities rather than "recognition" when individuals find themselves in conflict with a changing normative context. In 6.3, further exploration of

the “new norms” will lead to an examination of debates on “normalization” and the symbolic role of the recognition of same-sex couples will be elaborated on, and the question of generational differences will be addressed. Thereafter the notion of validation of life plans and identity choices will be invoked, in particular concerning parenting projects and parental roles. The case of lesbian and gay parenthood serves as an example of how for the individual concerned the legal norm can play a particularly significant role in providing a relatively stable reference norm, compared to the fluidity of social acceptance.

The review of legal norms as references of identity construction will return to the question of fieldwork choices and the relevance of the different national contexts in which they are situated.

6.1. The self and the norm

A recurrent view in the discourses analysed in chapters 3 to 5 has been that being “openly” gay or lesbian has become more common. Most narratives closely link the question of “coming out” to the often encountered narrative of progress, arguing that homosexuality has become far more accepted today than in the past. For many in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome (albeit not all) public identification as gay or lesbian today constitutes the norm rather than a transgression. More and more gays and lesbians come out at a younger age, and many refer to openness at work or in the street as evidence for a higher degree of acceptance.

6.1.1. “We have also changed a bit”

Discourses of social change have been looked at in greater depth in chapter 4. However, in addition to what is being said about society at large, several interviewees draw attention to changes within gay and lesbian behaviour and identity. Claudia, for example, describes her own changed attitudes at both her previous and present workplaces, at a museum and as an assistant in a medical practice:

Claudia (Roma, 33)

But [our] way of being has also changed, because we have also come out a bit more, I think. [...] We have also changed a bit. [...] I am also more [out]. At work I show myself quite a bit, [to her friends:] don't I? Both where I worked at the museum, and now, don't I? I have never experienced discrimination for that – curiosity yes. But, maybe it has changed. [...] The

superiors knew about it, I mean, before, such a thing was unthinkable, because they would sack you. I mean. But not now.¹

Social change and higher acceptance are here seen as reflexively influencing her colleagues and her own attitudes. For Claudia, gays and lesbians have changed in how they present themselves: "We have also changed a bit." The past is presented in an abstract notion, but with rather categorical statements such as "before, such a thing was unthinkable", "they would sack you".² When asked (in a later passage), such observations are related to what has been told and written about how things had been in the past ("from hearing about it" "reading about it"). While such a change applies to what she has observed in the past and to experiences she was told about by others, it equally applies to her desire to be more "out" and to her coming out narrative, according to which she wants to live a more openly lesbian identity.

The generational change is one that is observed by various respondents, and a range of sociologists have made similar observations. Some would go as far as seeing the formation of a homosexual identity under a completely different light today compared to older generations. As Ritch Savin-Williams, in his US study on "The New Gay Teenager" argues:

Gay adolescents have the same developmental concerns, assets, and liabilities as heterosexual adolescents. This unnoteworthy banality [...] suggests that they are in the forefront of what can be called a postgay era, in which same-sex-attracted individuals can pursue diverse personal and political goals.³

The term "postgay", in Savin-Williams terms, is linked to the idea that the experience of the insult and stigma vanishes as main element of a homosexual identity management. The Yale university campus, arguably a liberal elitist milieu, is of course a peculiar setting from which generalisations should be taken with some care, and Ritch-Savin is obviously discussing the US context rather than the European one, which is our focus. However aside from the different context, the main idea of generational change is one that is well exemplified in this study that looks specifically at this question. As is being argued, homosexuality has here become a "banality". However, the easiness of affirming homosexual identities gives way to other constraints and ideologies which define the construction of identities. One example for this

¹ Original: "Però, è cambiato anche questo modo di essere, perché siamo anche venuti fuori un po' di più. Credo, eh. [...] Anche noi siamo cambiati un pochino. [...] Io poi sono anche più, al lavoro mi espongo anche parecchio, no, sia prima dove lavoravo al museo, sia adesso no? Non ho mai subito discriminazione per questo. Curiosità, questo sì, però non, forse è cambiata. [...] I superiori lo sapevano, voglio dire, da, prima era impensabile no, una cosa del genere, perché ti licenziavano. O comunque ti guardavano male. Cioè. Ma adesso no."

² I have analysed the narrative construction of the past as a "dark past" in the light of progress discourses in Jörgens (2007) "East Berlin"

³ Savin-Williams (2005), *The New Gay Teenager*: 222

can be seen earlier in his text, where a Yale student is quoted saying that stigma, rather than being attached to being gay, is attached to being an activist:

This is going to sound really terrible, but in order to improve their sex lives on campus, people actually try to avoid being labelled as activists. People who are out on the front lines are almost viewed as unpopular in a certain way. I'm not going to use the word stigma, because that's too harsh – but there is a sense of that.⁴

The Yale student in this extract uses “labelled” and “stigma”, and may well be a student of sociology or familiar with these debates. One of the main concerns in this setting seems to be “to improve their sex lives”, but the risk of being “unpopular in a certain way” seems to equally extend to other aspects of social life. This description can thereby be read as showing that the normative context of this young “postgay” generation is not necessarily one that is characterised by the absence of normative expectations within the group; instead it shows a deliberate and careful construction of identity by the teenagers in which they respond to expectations and available positive images of homosexuality that assure a certain degree of “popularity”.

Before looking at the kind of images that arise concerning homosexuality, on a more abstract level, the question of identity construction and the understanding of the individual can be given a further explanatory role in the analysis. A further theoretical perspective on the individual and social norms is necessary to locate the analysis of social change within social theory approaches. For this purpose, in the following, we will consider Jean-Claude Kaufmann’s approach to what he calls the “sociology of the individual”.

6.1.2. Jean-Claude Kaufmann – individual and culture

In Kaufmann’s sociology of the individual (in Ego - pour une sociologie de l’individu⁵) the individual and individual autonomy are put into a cultural and historical context. At the outset, the key criticism he offers to what he sees as the ‘mainstream’ (according to him often implicitly formulated) understanding of the development of human culture is the role of the individual: he argues that the role of the ‘individual brain’ and ideologically misconceived rational/opportunistic individual human being is overrated.⁶ The individual brain that captures a certain amount of knowledge can create innovations that can be passed on. However, for him,

⁴ Yale student, Dixit 2001, in Savin-Williams (2005), *The New Gay Teenager*: 201

⁵ Kaufmann (2001), *Ego*

⁶ Ibid: chapter 1

the key factor of the development of civilization and culture is the exteriorisation of knowledge. For Kaufmann the problem is that the biological conditions for human intelligence and language articulation are often seen as the description of humanity's development (such as in the well-known drawing that shows the human bodies developing from that of a primate ape). Instead, the appearance of the "social fact" ("fait social"), dependent but not equal to the biological preconditions has to be seen as the founding element of the human being. For him, exteriorised culture and civilization is what produces the individual: "Because it is not the individuals having become intelligent that have invented civilization but the social fact that has produced fully human individuals."⁷ This analysis sets the framework of downplaying the role of individuality and individual autonomy in defining society.

In analysing the concept of the individual in modern society and engaging in the impact of Enlightenment philosophy, he relates himself to Durkheim who also sees the individual as the product of society.⁸ As Durkheim asserts: "Collective life was not born in individual life, but on the contrary, the latter was born in the first one."⁹ For Kaufmann "the (very real) individualisation of society is not the result of individual wills, but of a yet insufficiently known social process."¹⁰ Kaufmann equally refers to Berger and Luckmann "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product."¹¹

This perspective on culture and the individual provides a basis for rethinking individualisation. As we have seen, individualisation has been described by many, and Giddens in particular, as a process in which the liberalisation of lifestyles such as occurs through the acceptance of homosexuality can be located. Individualisation, then, for Kaufmann, needs to be understood as a product of historical social norms and not as a dynamic that takes root in an abstract autonomous human being. As he puts it in historicising terms: "Everyone is as in former times the social product of an era, but becoming a specific product."¹² While historically determined,

⁷ Ibid: 31. Original: "Car ce ne sont pas des individus devenus intelligents qui ont inventé la civilisation, c'est inversement le fait social qui a produit des individus pleinement humains."

⁸ Ibid: chapter 3

⁹ Durkheim [1998] quoted *ibid* : 77. Original: "La vie collective n'est pas née de la vie individuelle, mais c'est au contraire, la seconde qui est née de la première."

¹⁰ Ibid: 77. Original: "l'individualisation (bien réelle) de la société ne résulte pas des volontés particulières, mais d'un processus social encore mal connu." This view of course is not a new one, and interestingly, it seems analogous to a disciplinary divide between a more often individual based political philosophy (particularly contract theory), on the one hand, and a more society based social theory (particularly social constructivism), on the other hand.

¹¹ Berger and Luckmann [1986], quoted *ibid*: 87. Original: "La société est une production humaine. La société est une réalité objective. L'homme est une production sociale."

¹² Ibid: 79. Original: "Chacun étant comme autrefois le produit social de son époque, mais devenant un produit spécifique."

individualisation and a choice based concept of the self are what the individual (or better: what we understand as the individual) are about.¹³ This reading of an individualisation process complements the reading of the democratization of intimacy in the views of Giddens or Weeks for example, where the societal trends tend towards a greater liberalisation and choice-based construction of love and partnership.¹⁴

Kaufmann's analysis together with Honneth's social theory can thus provide a holistic view on how the individual and the meaning of social institutions in relation to her can be understood. Rather than being restricted to a specific policy or a specific political debate – such as on a partnership law - the very meaning of social and legal normative changes that surround the individual is being addressed, i.e. what it means to the individual and to identity construction. It is in this context of understanding the research question that the broader picture is useful here, and provides a frame on the concepts of individual, identity and recognition processes fundamental to the effects of social change.

Of course, Kaufmann's view of social determination must also be viewed critically. In particular, the evolutionary perspective, where an overarching drive from the foundation of civilisation as a result of the creation of the "social fact" ("fait social") to individualisation, with a long "pre-history of individualisation" ("préhistoire de l'individualisation") seems simplified, at best, if not ethnocentric and flawed.¹⁵ He sees this development both as a general tendency and as an unsteady process:

The individual historically to construct his or her autonomy, but the process takes different forms, is hesitant, and much less advanced than what is perceived in its representations. [...] [The] theories of individualisation [...] are true as a "tendency".¹⁶

It seems that in putting individualisation as a historical phenomenon into a greater picture of a universal development of civilisation, Kaufmann is failing to improve on simplified accounts of individualisation processes. However, for the purpose of this research, it is the use of the autonomous self as being "at the heart" of the social construction of reality, while

¹³ Ibid: 80

¹⁴ As discussed above, Giddens (1992), *The transformation*, Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), *Same-Sex Intimacies*

¹⁵ Kaufmann sees a "pre-history of individualisation" ("préhistoire de l'individualisation") stretching over two millennia and sees it somewhat as analogous to the establishment of the social fact ("fait social"). This comparison and its implicitly linear character seems to give individualisation in modern societies too large and too universal a status.

¹⁶ Kaufmann (2001), *Ego*: 91. Original: "L'individu tend historiquement à construire son autonomie, mais le processus est multiforme, hésitant, et infiniment moins avancé que ce qui est perçu dans les représentations. [...] [Les] théories de l'individualisation [...] sont vraies 'en tendance'."

simultaneously being also historically determined, that seems to provide a useful complementary concept for Honneth's framework. Kaufmann points to both the centrality and the usefulness of the concept of the autonomous self, while calling for suspicion concerning its explanatory use:

Even being pure fiction, the abstract self is now at the heart of the construction of reality. The theories that build on its authority therefore gain force and intelligibility. Thanks to this support, they can unveil the mechanisms of social change with even more efficacy as the element that brings concrete evolutions together is no other than the fictional category that feeds this belief. The price to pay, however, is high, because as they place themselves inside the central category of the construction of reality, [these theories] preclude any major break with common sens. [...] [To use] a simplified definition of individualisation [reinforces] the illusion.¹⁷

Placing the individual self as a central motor of social change is thus seen as being of great explanatory use despite being an "illusion". Instead, for Kaufmann, a circular view of individual and identity can account for social change. And as we will see, such a perspective is useful in explaining shifting identities in the context of the cases explored in this thesis .

6.1.3. *'The individual as a process'*

To be sure, Kaufmann's "circular" view of the individual is not a deterministic one. In *L'invention de soi* (2004), he refers to sociological/anthropological works of Goffman and Becker and the negotiation that is seen at the heart of the process of identity formation (Goffman) and the biographical dynamics of individual trajectories (Becker).¹⁸ In this line of thought, and in reference to Norbert Elias view of the individual, Kaufmann is depicting the individual as a process, where autonomy and socialisation are intertwined and not mutually exclusive:

The individual is a process, Norbert Elias repeats incessantly all through his work, [Kaufmann 2001] a dynamic, open process, in which the social and the individual are intimately linked in complex configurations [Elias 1991a]. "Individual" and "society" are, in the end, just simplifications of language and representation to separate, out of convenience, categories that in reality are much more diffuse and interconnected. This is why, in the analysis of the

¹⁷ Ibid: 91. Original: "Bien que pure fiction, le moi abstrait est désormais au cœur de la construction de la réalité. Les théories qui s'appuient sur son autorité acquièrent donc puissance et intelligibilité. Fortes de ces appuis, elles peuvent dévoiler les mécanismes du changement social, avec d'autant plus d'efficacité que l'élément fédérateur des évolutions concrètes n'est rien d'autre que la catégorie fictive alimentant la foi. Le prix à payer est cependant élevé. Car en s'inscrivant à l'intérieur de la catégorie centrale de la construction de la réalité, elles s'interdisent toute rupture majeure avec le sens commun. [...] [D'utiliser] une définition simplifiée de l'individualisation [renforce] l'illusion."

¹⁸ Kaufmann (2004), *L'invention de soi*: 44 : "Erving Goffman en particulier mit un soin particulier à combattre l'essentialisme, et à souligner combien l'identité, processus dynamique et ouvert, résultait d'une négociation permanente avec autrui." [Goffman 1975]

individual, one has accord a central importance to socialisation, because [the individual] is not a kind of entity that is (more or less) autonomous and that undergoes (more or less) the influence of different social frameworks. The social frameworks are not exterior to it. [...] The freedom of the actor is not anti-proportional to the weight of his or her determinations. *It is a question of two processes* that constantly and very narrowly cross one another. Identity as a matter of fact plays a precise role in this articulation. [my emphasis]¹⁹

Therefore to analyse the social constitution of the individual, it is fundamental to examine the different accounts of intersubjectivity. However, the positioning of the self in the normative context of society and law leads to a management of identity in either embracing, appropriating, rejecting or transforming normative contexts in which the individual moves. We have seen these different individual strategies in individual positioning to partnership norms in chapter 4. The individual is placed at the cross-lines between different social norms, and the necessity of evaluating their value and autonomously choosing between them is part of the normative context to which she belongs. The aim here is to take the choice element of identity seriously while taking the social complexities into account. As Kaufmann says: "Identity is a precise and specific phenomenon that needs to be defined and situated with exactitude in the immense and multiform fabric of the individual."²⁰

As we saw, Kaufmann sees the individual as a process, to a large extent driven by or immersed in social norms and role models. But despite his or her social constitution, the individual is described as implicated in the arbitration of a range of available norms and can take initiative as to embracing, rejecting or transforming them:

The objective characters are not almighty with regards to identity, and even less so as they are in fact deeply contradictory, transcended by permanent conflicts. This is a crucial point: the objective characters cannot by themselves determine the existence for the simple reason that they have nothing of a stable and coherent universe. Oppositions run through them in all directions and oblige the subject to get involved, whether he or she wants it or not. The capacity of initiative of the modern individual is essentially formed here and nowhere else, in this work of an arbiter more than in an assumed "self" that would place it far away from the social and at distance from roles [it could take on]. [Dubet 1994] The Goffmanian expression "identity bearer" reveals itself as profoundly ambiguous and risks to lead us to a wrong interpretation. Because of their heterogeneous multiplicity, in fact, the objective characters cannot, in some way, carry an identity by themselves. On the contrary, this work on identity that

¹⁹ Ibid: 49. Original: "*L'individu est un processus*' ne cesse de répéter Norbert Elias tout au long de son œuvre [Kaufmann, 2001]. Un processus dynamique, ouvert, où le social et l'individuel sont intimement imbriqués, dans des configurations complexes [Elias, 1991a]. « Individu » et « société » ne sont à la limite que des facilités de langage et de représentation pour séparer, par commodité, des catégories en réalité beaucoup plus diffuses et interpénétrées. C'est pourquoi il faut donner toute son importance à la socialisation dans l'analyse de l'individu. Car ce dernier n'est pas une sorte d'entité (plus ou moins) autonome qui subirait (plus ou moins) l'influence de divers cadres sociaux. Les cadres sociaux ne lui sont pas extérieurs. ... La liberté de l'acteur n'est pas inversement proportionnelle au poids des déterminations. *Il s'agit de deux processus*, qui s'entrecroisent sans cesse et très finement. L'identité joue justement un rôle précis dans cette articulation." [my emphasis]

²⁰ Ibid: 50. Original: "L'identité est un phénomène précis et spécifique, qu'il faut délimiter, et situer exactement dans l'immense fabrique multiforme de l'individu."

mixes and selects the elements which, in the following, will become carriers and thus confer the sense of life.²¹

And this view takes us back to the role that can be attributed to inter-subjective recognition on the one hand, and to a liberal, reciprocal understanding of society and interpersonal relations, on the other. Understood like this, Honneth's view of a struggle for recognition includes a concept of identity that responds to the analysis of its social construction. The construction is both social, according to the available norms, and individual, to the extent that the individual is understood as required to be an arbiter in forging an identity between contradicting and shifting normative frameworks.

6.1.4. Grand theory versus specific case

In sum, so far, through reworking a theoretical framework of recognition and individual identity, the question of the social constitution of the individual has been readdressed in 1) a Goffmanian notion of identity management, 2) Axel Honneth's recognition approach that takes spheres of love, law and social acceptance into account and 3) a sociological view of the individual that accounts both for the social construction of identity, the historicity of identity and social norms, the potential for social change and the value attached to the individual as an autonomous agent.

The material that has been looked at in this research has thereby provided an insight into the concept of the individual which can account for theoretical approaches, in particular Goffman, Honneth and Kaufmann. An experience of recognition in different spheres, through love, law and society, seems to be fundamental to the understanding of what the individual's participation in society is about. At the same time, the construction of the individual is itself a process that situates itself within these spheres. Independent, autonomous, and creative in defining their own lives, as we have conceptualized in the idea of identity management, the identities presented in the narrative discourses within this study are equally part of the

²¹ Ibid: 94. Original: "Les caractères objectifs ne sont pas tout-puissants au regard de l'identité. Et cela d'autant moins qu'ils sont en réalité profondément contradictoires, travaillés par des conflits permanents. Ce point est capital : les caractères objectifs ne peuvent à eux seuls déterminer l'existence pour la simple raison qu'ils n'ont rien d'un univers stable et cohérent. Des oppositions les traversent en tous sens, obligeant le sujet à s'impliquer, qu'il le souhaite ou non. La capacité d'initiative de l'individu moderne se forme pour l'essentiel ici et nulle part ailleurs, dans ce travail d'arbitrage beaucoup plus que dans un supposé « quant-à-soi » qui le placerait loin du social et à distance des rôles. [Dubet, 1994] L'expression goffmanienne de « porte-identité » se révèle donc profondément ambiguë, et risquant de nous induire en erreur. A cause de leur multiplicité hétérogène en effet, les caractères objectifs ne peuvent d'une manière porter par eux-même l'identité. A l'inverse, c'est le travail identitaire qui malaxe et sélectionne les éléments qui, par la suite, deviendront effectivement porteurs et conféreront alors le sens de la vie."

changing social norms that surround them. It is in this sense that the concept of recognition refers to an intersubjective process. In the contemporary context, one of the relevant spheres is situated at the level of the State. In recognizing specific life plans or choices, the State can provide a validation of specific norms, and thereby enters the process of identity formation. So does society at large, including the media, political representation, public figures, in addition to close social environments.

Having cast a wide theoretical angle, the focus needs to be brought back to the conclusions on the specific case addressed in this study. How should a dynamic sociology of this kind best be formulated? What does this theoretical background mean for the research question? How are the social and legal changes concerning homosexuality and same-sex couples experienced by the individual? How does the material from the empirical research relate to such a dynamic understanding of the individual? Many factors play a role in relating legal and social change to individual ethical views on how to lead a homosexual life. For some, the direct social environment will be crucial in formulating their public identities. Some will accept "outsider" positions when their identities are not being accepted. Others will adapt their social environments to their identity choices. However for others, the perceived changes in society at large will be crucial in determining their construction of identity. The law can thus, in many cases, provide an important impulse for judging on the degree of what is to be accepted by others. As we will see in 6.5, the legal element of such a change may well prove fundamental in certain projects such as parenting.

First, however, in the following, we will illustrate the role of the individual as an active agent in constructing identity in a transformed social context through examples gained from the interview material. The focus will be on challenges to identity construction, where initial strategies clash with those encountered in a transformed social environment. As will be shown, the negative cases of challenges most explicitly point to the interactive dimension of identity building that we have reviewed so far.

6.2. Transformed norms and challenges to identity management

The impact of the changing social context in the identity construction of gays and lesbians becomes most explicit when situations are considered in which normative choices clash with the transformations that they directly experience. Choices of how to manage identity and

sexuality in everyday life can come under scrutiny and be challenged in everyday social settings. Three narratives will be looked at, which, in quite different ways, illustrate this point.

A first example, which is a good illustration for such a challenge, is that of Nicole, who was previously introduced (see e.g. 4.4.1). The clash between her understanding of her lesbian identity and the new norm she perceives in her work environment and in society at large is particularly well described in a very illustrative narrative of her everyday life at work.

6.2.1. Nicole: *"I think it was a mistake"*

Nicole is a 54 year-old successful journalist living in central Paris, and a mother of a fourteen-year-old adopted daughter. At the time of the interview her lesbian relationship had lasted four years, although there were some difficulties, as her focus on work and her life with her daughter was not easy to accept for her partner, Fabienne, who is Swiss and only recently moved to Paris. Nicole sees herself primarily as a self-made woman and sees her personal life primarily as a private matter that should not be put to the foreground. The situation is different from that of Petra, a bisexual mother whose narrative was examined above (5.2.5), as Nicole's work environment does not appear to be hostile to homosexuality. With some bitterness, Nicole comments on a colleague who in his office displays pictures of his male partner, with whom he has also signed in a Pacs:

Nicole (Paris, 54)

Every day, he talks about his boyfriend. He's got his picture like we would have the photograph of our child, next to the computer, next to the ashtray. For him, it's the picture of his partner. I find that completely, a bit too much you know. But he's like that, he needs to be [ironically:] *reassured*, he is very [ironically:] *proud*. He is very proud to be recognized in that way and all of that. [...] Say, when you ask him, have you had a nice week-end, he says "we have", it ends up being a bit annoying. [...] I know that I myself don't go around telling the people I work with about my life, because it wouldn't cross my mind [to do that]. [...] I don't like that way of putting yourself on display. Because it's a guy who for the rest of it is rather dry, it's not a sweet one at all. He's always showing that [accentuated:] *he* has got feelings, while in fact, he thinks only about himself, he's a bit like everyone else. [...] Yourcenar [a French writer], nobody has ever dared to bring in her private life. That's what I like – [...] living peacefully, openly, without making a religion out of it [...] and without being bothered by others.²²

²² Original: "Tous les jours il parle de son ami, il y a sa photo comme nous on pourrait avoir la photo de nos, de notre petit même, à côté de l'ordinateur, à côté du cendrier. Lui, il a la photo de son ami. Je trouve sa complètement, un peu too much quoi. Mais il est comme ça, Il a besoin d'être [ironique :] rassuré, il est très [ironique :] fier. Il est très fier d'être reconnu comme ça et tout ça. [...] Et donc, si on lui dit, "Tu as passé un bon week-end?", il dit "nous avons", enfin je veux dire, ça finit par être un peu casse pied. [...] Moi, je sais que je raconte pas ma vie aux gens avec qui je bosse, parce que ça me viendrait pas à l'idée. [...] Moi j'aime pas cette façon de s'afficher. Parce que c'est un mec qui par ailleurs est assez sec, enfin, c'est pas un tendre du tout. Et donc il est toujours en train de montrer que [accentué :] lui, il a des sentiments, [accentué :] lui, etc. Alors qu'en fait il pense qu'à lui-même, un peu comme tout le monde. [...] Par exemple Yourcenar, - bon, ça, à l'époque où elle, elle a fait ces trucs, s, sa conduite dans la ville, l'a pas empêchée d'être reconnue, jamais personne n'a osé

For Nicole, it seems that her dislike of her colleague's partner's photograph on the office desk expresses a feeling of setback resulting from the recognition of a new norm. The rising norm of public same-sex partnership coincides with putting into question the value given to the self-made woman who had publicly focused on her professional identity.²³ The dominant norm where homosexuality is restricted to the private domain, as has been noted above, seems to have been altered, at least in Nicole's office in Paris. The question of public identity successfully illustrates the shift in norms: it stands for the recognition of a value rather than of a person. In this interview extract, the norm appears in the office space in the form of a photograph on her colleague's desk, which ultimately undermines Nicole's identity, i.e. her choices on how to manage it. She underlines the value shift through the description of the image his "display" of intimacy provides, which implies a positive impression on others: "He's always showing that [accentuated:] *he* has got feelings." Her colleague seems to incarnate the opposite of Nicole's values of keeping discretion over one's love life. There also seems to be some regret on her side that her colleague is accorded a positive notion of tenderness due to his affirmative stance. According to this logic, public display of an intimate identity is connoted with "feeling" and "sweet", while the option not to be "bothered" does not trigger any such positive connotations. This shift in turn influences the construction of identities, where the concept of homosexuality moves along with value shifts in society.

The challenge to Nicole's normative choices in the construction of her identity are explicitly addressed when she refers to the fact that she had kept her homosexuality a secret before her own daughter, ever since she had adopted her as a baby, through an international adoption in Brazil around 1990.

Nicole (Paris, 54)

FJ: So she does not now about it ...

N: No. Well, she knows that it exists, and of course – a clever kid who lives in Paris knows many things. – But I haven't told her that this concerns me. I am so afraid. I am still afraid of her reaction, because she is very much of a type "what do the others think of me". Oh well, I don't know, I was probably wrong, but I don't know. – And I had talked to someone who agreed with me that it was better to wait. I think that was a mistake, but that's how it is.²⁴

faire intervenir sa vie privée. Ça j'aime bien, [...] vivre tranquillement, ouvertement sans en faire une foi, [...] et sans se faire emmerder quoi."

²³ On the self-made woman, see Jean-Claude Kaufmann's subtle analysis in Kaufmann (1999), *La femme seule et le prince charmant*

²⁴ Original: "FJ : Donc, en fait elle est pas au courant de... N : Non, alors, elle sait que ça existe, et que, ben évidemment, un gamin futé qui vit à Paris il sait beaucoup de choses. – Mais je ne lui ai pas dit que ça me concernait quoi. J'ai tellement peur, j'ai quand même peur de sa réaction, parce que, elle, elle est très 'qu'est-ce que pensent les autres de moi'. Oh, je ne sais pas, j'ai probablement déconné là, mais je sais pas. – Et j'en ai parlé

She puts her own construction of identity into question, a construction she partly sees as irreversible due to the image she produces in front of her daughter and the fear of the adolescent's reaction. "I was probably wrong" ("j'ai probablement déconné") and "I think that was a mistake" ("je pense que c'était une erreur") explicitly address choices that are judged to have been the wrong ones. Consequently, an openly lesbian identity as a mother, in contrast, would then seem to have been the "right" choice in Nicole's retrospective assessment.

Two norms conflict with Nicole's personal identity: that of "openness" and of the "partnership", both in relation to her work environment and to her daughter. These two spheres constitute the central elements in what is important to Nicole in her life. In one case she resists and outspokenly criticises the norm of publicly committed same-sex partnership that has found its way into her office environment in the form of a photograph of her colleague's partner. Concerning her daughter, however, towards whom she had hidden her homosexuality and for whom the social context of her mother's relationship had been precluded, her very own choices are doubted and retrospectively judged as having been "a mistake".

6.2.2. Katharina: "I would never have thought that"

A quite different example is that of Katharina and her experience at her work place as a stage technician. The context is one that can be described as located in the "new Berlin": With growing social acceptance and greater visibility in Berlin, the official support of gay and lesbian events by the City hall and local town halls, openly gay and lesbian public figures and the legal recognition of same-sex partnership since 2000, having gay and lesbian identities publicly in Berlin today constitutes the norm rather than a transgression, and perhaps more so than in the other three cities, in which more conflicts had been felt and where secrecy had been more frequent (see table in 5.2). The following extract tells of Katharina's experience at work, where her careful "private" approach to managing her identity was seen as inappropriate. She was explicitly asked by her boss to explain her sexual orientation – which is described by Katharina as a non-conflictual event that illustrates the trend from secrecy and privacy to the expectation of openly expressing a sexual orientation:

à quelqu'un qui était d'accord avec moi, il fallait mieux attendre. Je pense que c'était une erreur, mais c'est comme ça."

Katharina (Berlin, 22)

K: I work only with men, in a technical sector, and therefore, at the beginning, I had many scruples. ... At some stage, when you get to know each other and talks get into more personal things, because you spend eight or ten hours a day together after all, there were always some questions coming up. 'So, do you have a boyfriend?' – 'Err, nope, I don't.' You know, that kind of thing. People don't necessarily get my sexual preferences from my looks. Especially guys don't, I would say. [laughs] [...] So I also let them see me with my girlfriend, my former girlfriend. It was spotted by my boss, as it were. And the way it happened in the end was that in front of various other colleagues, I was directly asked about it [by my boss]. And that was, well, it came across as quite funny, you know. I was flabbergasted, because [laughs] I was not prepared for that, for such directness. But, well, I would never have thought that they are all so easy going, and it was totally ok. They just wanted to know, along those lines, because they couldn't really classify me. But it's quite funny.

FJ: So what did you answer then?

K: Yes, I simply said [laughs]: I like women. Men as well; I make exceptions sometimes. [laughs] And then it was ok, the thing was dealt with, because before that I had seen that questions were coming up behind my back, and they didn't really dare to ask me. But my boss was more resolute – definitely. [...] By now it came out that two of my colleagues also go for men as well, and it's all easy-going.²⁵

It seems that Katharina did not have a chance to stay private about her love life and was implicitly forced to talk about her sexual orientation. For her, this turn of events was a positive one, according to the "scruples" she initially had, and her subsequent description of her work place as one where "it's all easy-going". But rather than being choice-driven, it seems that Katharina adapts to the norm she is confronted with in her work environment. She is faced with the norm of public homosexual identity, which she is somewhat surprised to find in her field ("only with men, in a technical sector"). In this metropolitan setting, it seems that secrecy, privacy, and taboo have given way to public sexual identities.²⁶ In this sense, the new normative context does not only imply a lowering of the level of constraints in being out, but also a transformed expectation of how homosexuality is to be lived overall. But an expectation

²⁵ Original: "K: Ich arbeite nur mit Männern zusammen, im Technikbereich, und, deshalb halt ganz zu Anfang hatte ich da sehr viele Skrupel. [...] Irgendwann, wenn man sich n bisschen kennt dann geht's dann in Gesprächen doch eher ins Persönliche, weil, man verbringt dann doch acht bis zehn Stunden am Tag miteinander, es gab so halt immer Fragereien, und hast du n Freund, öh, nö, hab ich nicht, ne, und, also, ich sag mal so. Man merkt nicht unbedingt mir meine sexuellen Präferenzen an, wenn man mich sieht. Vor allem wenn man n Kerl ist behaupte ich mal [lacht], [...] Also ich hab mich da auch – einmal mit meiner Freundin, damaligen, sehen lassen, Wurde auch von meinem Chef sozusagen gesehen, und hier und da, und, - - ja, letztendlich verlief das so, dass ich halt in einer größeren Kollegenrunde [von meinem Chef] direkt darauf angesprochen wurde, ne. Und das war, das kam doch schon sehr lustig rüber, ja. Also mir blieb die Spucke weg, weil ich [lacht kurz] nun doch ein wenig überfordert war, mit soviel Direktheit, aber, - also, ich hätte nicht gedacht, dass die alle so locker drauf sind, ja, und das war, völlig ok. Die wollten das bloß halt wissen, so, so nach dem Motto. Weil sie mich irgendwie mich nicht richtig einordnen konnten, aber das ist schon ganz lustig. - FJ: Und was hast du dann geantwortet? - K: Äh, - ich meinte ja, einfach, [lacht] - ich meinte, ja - ich steh auf Frauen, - auch auf Männer, - ich mach mal Ausnahmen. [lacht] Ja, und dann war gut, dann war die Sache vom Tisch, weil also, davor hab ich das so erlebt, dass von einigen Kollegen doch schon so so irgendwie so hintenrum Fragereien aufkamen, und die sich nicht so getraut haben, dann wirklich zu fragen, aber mein Chef ist da resoluter gewesen, also - ja. [...] Mittlerweile hat sich herausgestellt, dass zwei von meinen Kollegen auch durchaus was für Männer übrig haben, und, das ist da alles ganz locker."

²⁶ As discussed above, on the decline of the *don't-ask-don't-tell* identity, see Broqua and de Brusscher (2003), "La crise de la normalisation": 26ff.

of openly public homosexual identities continues to bear risks. Thereby, for some, a conflict arises between risk avoidance, on the one hand, and adapting to norms of "being out", on the other.²⁷

While Katharina encounters acceptance of her lesbian or bisexual identity at her workplace, this acceptance comes with a clear expectations of the public nature of her identity. Being secretive about her sexual identity seems to be undesirable at her workplace. What mattered to her colleagues, and her boss, was to classify her sexual identity: "I was not prepared for [...] such directness. [...] They just wanted to know [...] because they couldn't really classify me" ("Ich [war] nun doch ein wenig überfordert [...] mit soviel Direktheit. [...] Die wollten das bloß halt wissen, so nach dem Motto, weil sie mich irgendwie nicht richtig einordnen konnten.") There is a clear expectation for Katharina to declare her sexual identity publicly. She refers to this demand as "directness", and to the whole situation as them being "easy going". Of course, one could imagine such a situation to be much less "easy going" in that the expectation to "tick a box" in matters of sexuality in a public place such as at work may be lived as intrusive or uncomfortable. Thus, Nicole's and Katharina's interpretation of a similar normative context bear very different connotations. Both cases, however, clearly present a similar challenge – that was dealt with in different ways.

6.2.3. Jason: "it was just too difficult"

Similar norms are equally in play in Jason's narrative. In his case, it is his own transformation that is most explicitly talked about. He changes from being a (heterosexually) married man who has frequent homosexual encounters, to being a gay man who is "looking for relationships" with men. While the role of the social norms around him is much less clear than in the previous two cases, the norms of open homosexuality and partnership as values of identity construction are central to Jason's narrative of change.

He is a successful professional in his late 40s, lives in East London but frequents bars in the West End, in Soho, where he had been approached for interview. He has been married to a woman for 16 years, before recently getting divorced. Over time, his sexual behaviour has

²⁷ On the question of "coming out" from a discourse analysis perspective, as referred to above, Ken Plummer "Coming out, breaking the silence and recovering. Introducing some modernist tales" in Plummer (1995), *Telling Sexual Stories*: 50-61.

become bisexual, but he clearly sees his sexuality as gay and this in turn as the reason why the marriage failed:

Jason (London, 47)

J: I am currently in a relationship, err, which is very new. It's about four months old. [...]

FJ: So, you were married with [to] a woman?

J: Yes. –

FJ: So when did that break apart? – Recently?

J: Six months ago. [...]

FJ: Was it related to the fact that you had a new relationship, or also a relationship with a man?

J: No, [laughing] it was related to the fact that I was gay and it wasn't working. [...] I told my wife I was gay about nine years ago. [...] [Patricia] clearly was upset at the time, but we decided, because, when I married her she had three children, and they were still at school and we decided that we'd stay together, you know, whilst they were still at school and growing up and all the rest of it. [...] For taking on an instant family, three is enough.

FJ: [laughs] And how did this happen then, after [...] seven years of marriage, that you decided to be gay or that you found out to be gay?

J: Well it was increasingly difficult to maintain a relationship knowing what she knew about me, and the fact that I needed some kind of contact with men. It was just too difficult. So, after sixteen and a half years or so, we decided that we'd separate. Mm. And then I would be free to live the kind of life that I wanted to live.

The end of the marriage takes the form of a “coming out” story rather than being described as a divorce-story – a failure of the relationship itself. The sexual identity is seen as an outside factor that made the relationship to his wife impossible: “it was increasingly difficult to maintain”. The “difficulty” - which related to his wife's expectations, his own desires, possibly societal pressures that view his behaviour as unsustainable – contrasts with the subsequent description of his identity management of casual sex encounters as not being “the kind of life that [he] wanted to live”. These two elements thus refer both to feasibility and to choice. Both combined triggered a shift in how he conceives of his sexual identity.

In this narrative, despite consecutive heterosexuality and homosexuality both in his sexual behaviour and public identity, his gay identity takes precedence. His sexual desire to be with men was initially expressed in the form of a double life that put strain on his marriage, where his role as a (step-) father in particular made him refrain from separating. He therefore saw sexual activity with men as a necessity, that however needed to be lived without “looking for a relationship”, as he later says. In the subsequent passage, Jason clearly distinguishes between looking for sexual encounters, on the one hand, and looking for a relationship, on the other. He has been constructing the latter one with a younger man for the past four months:

Jason (London, 47)

J: We met on Christmas Eve and we've been together ever since. And it's kind of serious. He's a lot younger than I am. Seventeen years younger than I am.

FJ: Yeah. Where did you meet?

J: - We actually met on the internet. [...] Gaydar, [internet platform] [...]

FJ: Were you using basically the internet as a meeting point already before that, also for example during the years when you were married?

J: Well, during the years when I was married, it was different, I wasn't looking for a relationship, I was looking for casual sex.

FJ: Yeah.

J: So, yeah, meet people in the internet, in saunas, bars, whatever.

FJ: And, so basically, when you met your partner now, was it clear from the beginning that you wanted a relationship, or did you first meet in another way. Or how did that work, how did that happen?

J: Well, we had that discussion actually the first time we met, yes. We were both looking for a relationship. Yeah. It wasn't quite 'love at first sight', but almost.

The use of the internet is interesting here in that, in contrast to what could have been assumed, its use is not restricted to a specific type of activity or encounter. Unlike what is usually associated to the geographical definitions of casual sex, such as in parks, saunas et cetera, the internet, and *Gaydar* as the most widely used internet site in the UK, is a forum Jason has used with the clearly defined aim of first "looking for casual sex" and then "looking for a relationship". An internet site such as *Gaydar* equally provides an extreme case of explicit identity management: a "profile" is designed where different characteristics (body, work, leisure, but also being "out" or not) are filled in according to how the user wants to present himself (or herself in the case of *Gaydargirls*). And what the user is "looking for" is opted in a drop down menu from a range of pre-given options: "chat", "relationship", "friendship", "1-to-1 sex", "date", "group sex". Jason's transformation can thereby be pictured in terms of changed options on such an online drop-down menu.²⁸ In the latter search, the aim was seemingly very explicit at his first contact with his new boyfriend, in that he states that it was a topic of discussion at the first "meeting" (where it is not clear whether "meeting" refers to meeting on the internet or in person): "we had that discussion, actually the first time we met, yes. We were both looking for a relationship." Also, in describing how he met his new boyfriend through the internet, Jason had used the word "love", while ironically playing with the romantic connotation: "it wasn't quite love at first sight, but almost." In one narrative, we can here see the management of a double identity – a married man who engages in casual sex with men – the building of a "gay" identity – he tells his wife that "he is gay" – and finally the purposeful looking for a same-sex relationship where the romantic idea of a loving couple is invoked:

²⁸ While a "virtual identity" allows for more such instant reconstructions of identity, such as through the use of a "drop-down menu", it still follows patterns of social constraints in the conventional sense (see e.g. Westfall concerning a perspective on virtual identities: Joseph Westfall. "What is cyberwoman?: The Second Sex in cyberspace." (*Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2000: 159-166), see p. 160 - particularly in the case of Jason's internet usage, as the online interaction is used for the purpose of "meeting" sexual partners or potential boyfriends rather than being restricted to the cyberspace.

"the kind of life I wanted to live." In this retrospective narrative, instead, "love" remains unmentioned: it is neither evoked for his marriage nor for his encounters before separating.

Finally, the type of commitment Jason is looking for in his relationship includes that they discussed the "possibility" of Civil Partnership as an institutional choice:

Jason (London, 47)

FJ: Would you want to sign up for a Civil Partnership or marriage?

J: Well, in the term of a relationship it's a bit too soon. But we have actually talked about it.

FJ: So what did you say about it?

J: As a possibility.

FJ: How did you talk about it?

J: Well, just as a possibility.

The question was here raised in general, abstract terms, but was answered with concrete reference to his new relationship. Jason, to a certain degree and through various strategic steps (telling his wife, looking for a relationship) constructs an overall new relational context for his sexual identity, in which difficulties and conflicts are overcome, with the aim to form an identity that corresponds to "the kind of life [he wants] to live." The mentioning of the "possibility" (a term that Jason here brings into the interview conversation) of Civil Partnership or marriage illustrates the very research question posed in this thesis. The option of conceiving homosexual desires around the idea of a committed partnership transforms his public identity, his life plans and, according to the interview narrative, his sexual behaviour. The legal existence of the Civil partnership, if anything, provides an *image* for such a conception of homosexuality: it is a "possibility" that has entered the couple discourse between Jason and his younger partner. Thus, if not more than that, it becomes a discursive formula that the couple evokes when projecting partnership commitment.

To be sure, in this coming out process, he describes having faced major difficulties, one of the most important for him being the conflict and loss of contact with his step-children because of this:

Jason (London, 47)

FJ: Do you see your step children still on a regular basis then?

J: Not at the moment. I personally told them that I was gay and they found that very hard to deal with. And of course very hard to deal with the fact that I was separating from their mother. And hard to deal with the fact that we both had kept this a secret from them for so long. So at the moment they're angry, you know, hurt, disappointed. But then we've known each other for more than twenty years, so I hope that the strength of our relationship will get us over that.

His overthrowing of his past identity thereby comes at a high cost. It seems, however, that the "difficulty" of maintaining his marriage was more fundamental than the difficulties he describes here. Similar to Nicole's case, the "secrecy" of his previous identity management is described as a mistake: at least a past strategy that makes his wife's children suffer ("hard to deal with the fact that we both had kept this a secret"). Thus in both cases, for a homosexual parent, it seems that "privacy" and "secrecy", rather than being an effective form of identity management, are now challenged and can appear to have been "a mistake".

This strategy to address identity through a coming out process that upsets the main aspects of one's public identity, such as in Jason's case, is quite different to the creation of a social space such as a cruising area where a specific aspect of one's identity is lived. Rather than isolated social settings that are kept apart and in which identity can be managed, "coherent" and "true" identities are looked for. This can also be the case when gays and lesbians decide on specific work environments for their careers, or cities, countries or areas to live in. As we have described above, gays and lesbians can, and often do, shift their entire biographies towards a more promising social setting in which homosexuality will be accepted.

The three examples we have given here that concerned the challenges of identity construction or the upsetting of previous strategies of identity management, Nicole, Katharina, and Jason, are quite different in nature. Also, they have been picked specifically to illustrate this point and should not be considered as representative for the field as a whole. In Nicole's case, a challenge at work and regret towards her daughter are both closely linked to a changing social environment (colleagues, friends, her daughter's views), and both are described as difficult instances. In Katharina's case, the "challenge" of being forced to be "open" about her lesbian or bisexual identity is described as "easy-going" and experienced as a "surprising" but very positive event. Jason, instead, much more subtly presents a change within himself and his relationship to his ex-wife, where a type of identity management that could hold for over a decade became unsustainable. And this change within his own choice of strategies happens to be paralleled by societal transformations such as the legal recognition of same-sex couples. Without suggesting a causal link, his case can illustrate the *possibility* of how the normative macro-changes impact on the individual him- or herself in a fundamental way. The three examples can thus serve as illustrations of the notions of process and intersubjectivity in Nicole's, Katharina's and Jason's individual responses to the norms around them. After these

examples, in the next section, the analysis returns to a more abstract description of images and interpretations of new norms surrounding homosexuality and same-sex couples.

6.3. New norms, new images: "public" openness and stable partnership

The influence of changes within the normative environment on the individual can be described as the reaction to pictures that are constantly perceived and taken in by the individual. In this section, the role of images will be discussed and the norms of openness and of the couple will be analysed on the basis of examples from fieldwork, literature, and the media. The first concerns the idea of being public about a gay or lesbian identity; the second refers to the modelling of aspirations and projects on a committed, stable partnership.

6.3.1. Images

Images are constitutive of identity choices: They form a backdrop to identity construction. The individual is transcended by images, constituting a normative social environment. With symbolic recognition, images, references and social legitimacy are established. The construction of a lesbian or gay identity fundamentally depends on the images that are available. The recognition of same-sex couples, whether through registered partnership, *Pacs*, or same-sex marriages, provides one image among others – an image centred on the idea of the committed long-term relationship.

Hans, recalling his childhood in the 1960s, links the marginalisation he experienced because of being gay to the absence of images of homosexual life options:

Hans (Berlin, 47)

I would have liked to live my childhood like this, with these kind of images simply existing, showing that all kind of different things are possible. – But I enjoyed being an outsider anyway.

At this level, the social changes through the social recognition that has occurred puts into question whether gays and lesbians should still be regarded as occupying a marginal position in society, which in turn renders secrecy as much as revolt somehow obsolete. With reference to the social pressure of following a conventional life style, Nadine says that much of her revolt attitude stemmed from it:

Nadine (Berlin, 45)

Maybe I would not have been running around as a punk for example. It was really being against everything.

The individual can manipulate the pictures by re-appropriating or rejecting them, as we have seen in the discourses on marriage and partnership. But equally the pictures can burst into an individual's life,²⁹ and challenge choices of identity management, as we have seen in the previous section. The "photograph" in Nicole's narrative represented the most explicit metaphorical mentioning of such an image.

In this sense, images have the potential to force the constitution of the self into a new project. In accepting such a description of the interplay between images and the self, the shifting norms and changing images around conceptions of homosexuality and the couple would be expected to have a sweeping impact on life projects and the self-conceptions of lesbians and gays. In the discourses throughout the fieldwork, the changing images have been viewed as either comforting a desired identity construction ("open", "out", "commitment"), or as challenging certain public and private identities ("a mistake"). Thus, one cannot speak of the recognition of homosexual identity as such in a one-dimensional sense. Instead, the recognition of certain norms of "public" identities and of committed partnership constitutes a fundamental transformation of the normative environment. It is clear that the change that is viewed as a symbolic appreciation of gay and lesbian life choices throughout society, on television, in political debates etc., has equally had an impact on the potentiality of self-construction and life projects. This image does not necessarily represent an affirmation of what gays and lesbians are like; instead, it has established itself as a central norm of reference. Surely, other references have not ceased to exist, and the norms of being "public" and of the couple can also be rejected or treated ironically or yet again re-appropriated in various ways. Different discourses on the couple in chapter 4 have exemplified this. Lived realities are far more diverse than simply being reproductions of such an image. But at the symbolic and the referential level, this aspect of *normalization* seems to take place, as will be discussed below. Thereby, to a certain extent, the secret and the taboo have moved from being linked to homosexuality as such to specific choices of sexuality and intimacy, such as arguably casual sex, unfaithfulness, prostitution, fetish, cruising, or large age differences.

For the notion of "images" we can again turn to Jean-Claude Kaufmann. In *L'invention de soi* (2004), he analyses the individual's use of images in working on her own identity in a

²⁹ Kaufmann (2004), *L'invention de soi*: 254f. Original: "L'identité se caractérise par ses sauts volatiles, faisant se succéder en séquences serrées les modalités les plus diverses ; un projet peut brusquement surgir d'une image qu'ego croyait regarder comme un pur spectacle. Car les images, toutes les images, alimentent de façon permanente, de près ou de loin, l'inventivité identitaire."

continuous construction of the self that is equally influenced by the images around her and how she is able to manipulate (or appropriate) the meaning of the images to her own ends, i.e. in coherence with the forged identity.

[The] individual uses the images that are being offered to him, or that bombard him in a continuous machine-gunning: paper images, video images, living images of randomly captured scenes. His capacity to instantly record their messages is ever higher [Sauvageot, 1994], and so is his capacity to manipulate them for identity-oriented purposes, without even being aware of the work he accomplishes (the visions are mostly perceived as simple fictional and distracting exercises).³⁰

In this sense, and in line with the conception of the individual that has been established so far, the images need to be seen as constitutive of identity choices: they form the very basis of identity choices and their management. But as we have equally seen, the individual agent, through her choices, rejects or re-appropriates images, and thus holds a central, active role. She can, at least potentially, manipulate the use she can make of the images. We may view this as a "collage" or patchwork identity, where the modern self can be the artist who cuts bits and pieces of received images into a chosen picture. Kaufmann insists on the double force, both of the individual (ego) to manipulate the pictures, and of the pictures to burst into ego's identity:

The logic of the long dreamt-of and ripened project is for that matter very different from the identity ICO that is improvised in the urgency of the moment. The identity is characterised by its volatile leaps that make the most diverse modalities follow one another in tight sequences. A project can forthrightly emerge from an image that EGO thought to be watching as a mere spectacle. Because the images, all images, closely or loosely nourish the identity-creating inventiveness. They are the sleeping water one needs to be wary of.³¹

The pictures have a potential to swipe the constitution of the self into a new "project". In accepting such a description of the interplay between images and the self, the shifting norms and changing images around conceptions of homosexuality and the couple would be expected to have a sweeping impact on gay and lesbian identities, of the life projects and self-conceptions of the individuals concerned. In the discourses throughout the fieldwork, the changing images have been viewed either as comforting a desired identity construction, or as challenging certain public and private identities. They are either embraced or re-appropriated,

³⁰ Kaufmann (2004), *L'invention de soi*: 253. Original: "[L]'individu utilise les images qui s'offrent à lui, voire qui l'assaillent, dans un mitraillage continu : images papier, images vidéo, images vivantes de scènes captées au hasard. Sa capacité à enregistrer instantanément leurs messages est de plus en plus élevée [Sauvageot, 1994]. Sa capacité à les manipuler à des fins identitaires aussi. Sans même avoir conscience du travail qu'il accomplit (les visionnages sont majoritairement perçus comme de simples exercices fictionnels et distrayants)."

³¹ Ibid: 254f. Original: "La logique du projet longuement rêvé et mûri est d'ailleurs très différente de l'identité ICO improvisée dans l'urgence de l'instant. L'identité se caractérise par ses sauts volatiles, faisant se succéder en séquences serrées les modalités les plus diverses ; un projet peut brusquement surgir d'une image qu'ego croyait

or yet again set aside. As we have seen, societal change has mostly been viewed as a symbolic appreciation of gay and lesbian life choices, observed as a "spectacle" (in Kaufmann's term) throughout society: on television, in political debates etc., has equally had an impact on the potentiality of self construction and life projects. (Compare Christophe's description of the media image of homosexuality: "it is still the transvestite", chapter 3)

So what do these changing pictures mean to lesbian and gay lifestyles more generally speaking? Can examples be given for a new image of homosexuality, on the one hand, and different lifestyle behaviour, on the other?

As we have seen, one can speak of a circular, inter-subjective development of societal norms. Concrete ways of life (such as the understanding of a lesbian or gay identity) have an influence on frame goals (such as conjugality and public partnership), that in turn form the basis of the social interaction through which the identity is constructed. The recognition of same-sex couples, implicitly and explicitly, represents 1) a recognition of conjugality in lesbian and gay lives, 2) the implementation of a non-discrimination principle between homosexual and heterosexual orientation in constructing family law and 3) the recognition of a public construction of partnership in different social environments, such as towards family members and colleagues, but also in front of the State and the law. These new spaces are without doubt progress for the freer construction of public homosexual identities. But, as we have seen, rather than facilitating any kind of lifestyle choices, they equally require conformity to a set of values that are implied in this shift.

6.3.2. Recognition and the norm of public, open homosexuality

The expectation of a coherent public sexual identity seems to be something that accompanies the development of what is viewed as a more liberal attitude towards homosexuality. The trend towards more openness has repeatedly been pointed to in the analysis of the interviews for this study. The biographical dimensions of these narratives need to be taken into account in evaluating such discourses, as "coming out" stories regularly imply such an "openness" turn, which is mostly linked to a life phase rather than to societal change. But our observations have gone beyond this, and a broad picture of the four cities' contexts has been provided. A trend

regarder comme un pur spectacle. Car les images, toutes les images, alimentent de façon permanente, de près ou de loin, l'inventivité identitaire. Elles sont une eau qui dort dont il faut se méfier."

and a desire to greater openness on the one hand, has been contrasted to the continuity of a case-to-case management of public and private identities on the other.

In addition to the discourses from the fieldwork that have already established an outline of such a normative shift, the media representation of 'openness', 'privacy' and alleged 'hypocrisy' can serve to complement this analysis. As an illustration of the norm of 'openness', we can thus look at the media representation of two cases of British politicians' sexual behaviour and identity during the 2006 leadership contest of the Liberal Democrats, the third largest political party in the UK. The anecdotal reference to two politicians, Mark Oaten and Simon Hughes, is interesting here because it highlights both the rejection of "private" sexual identity on the one hand, and the stigma of casual sex, prostitution and the double life on the other.

In this instance, the arguably notorious British press brought debates about homosexuality into a negative light concerning these two front-bench MPs, both initial contenders for the leadership of the Liberal Democrats at the beginning of 2006.³² Mark Oaten, a married man, was discovered to have had sexual contact with male prostitutes.³³ In his case, it was not homosexuality that was a problem, but the view that he was a hypocrite: that he had been publicly false about his sexual identity and that he had hypocritically promoted "family values" by showing himself as a married man. In national newspapers, the rent boy who had sold his story was quoted as saying: "He's a very troubled man living a very dangerous double life."³⁴ The terms "troubled", "dangerous" and "double life" echo the incompatibility of public heterosexuality and private/secret homosexuality, in addition to the adultery involved. The *News of the World*, which made the story public, clearly referred to the hypocrisy of a double life that combines heterosexual family and homosexual activities as unacceptable:

He has no qualms about using family values to further his career. His website boasts he is a family man who lives with them in his constituency. Just 12 days ago Oaten launched his ill-fated leadership bid with wife Belinda firmly at his side. And when he backed out on Thursday he said: "I'm going to spend the weekend with my family."³⁵

There is an incompatibility that is suggested between Oaten's family values and a part of his sexual identity, which seems to correspond to the general perception in society on these

³² A contest that followed Charles Kennedy's "outing" as an alcoholic – he had been the previous liberal democrat leader.

³³ Gaby Hinsliff. "Leading Lib Dem quits over sex scandal." (*The Observer*, Sunday January 22, 2006), online version <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/politics/story/0,,1692336,00.html>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Neville Thurlbeck. "Lib-Dem Oaten's 3-in-bed-rent-boy-shame." (*News of the world*, Sunday, January 22, 2006), online version <http://notwats.blogspot.com/2006/01/lib-dem-oatens-3-in-bed-rent-boy-shame.html>

matters. Of course, his involvement with male prostitutes would have been fatal to his career for other reasons. But the view of hypocrisy and the allegedly misleading family picture he had provided are very similar to the expectations of coherence, openness and public nature of sexual identity that has also been found at Katharina's workplace.

Even more than in Oaten's case, the next Liberal Democrat in the same leadership contest (there were initially four candidates) to face a similar difficulty, Simon Hughes, was accused of having "misled" the public about his sexuality by not speaking up about having had homosexual relationships:

Chris Huhne, one of the Liberal Democrat leadership contenders, suggested yesterday that his rival Simon Hughes was out of the race because he had misled the public about his sexuality. [Hughes] apologised for misleading people. His friends said he had wanted to keep details of his sexuality private for fear of upsetting his mother, who is in her 80s.³⁶

In this case, even more than in Oaten's, the dominant norm seems to exclude keeping private about a sexual identity. While in contrast to Oaten, the revelation did not lead to a withdrawal from public functions and from the leadership race, the prospects of Hughes' success were generally seen as crushed by the revelation. Here again, the openness to homosexual identities constitutes a clear expectation of how homosexual identity can be lived: it needs to be publicly defined as a sexual identity. And Hughes loses out in this respect. What the example from the political media debate in the UK shows is that, in contrast to what we have found in chapter 1 and in dominant progress and liberalisation discourse in chapter 4, rather than society just having become more "open" and tolerant and homosexuality being accepted or even "trendy", a full account of the change in acceptance needs to take new normative constraints into account. Not anything goes. The rules of identity management have changed. But while they open up many perspectives for homosexual identities, the transformed context can backfire for some.

The norm of openness is equally one that can be observed in the transformation of the gay and lesbian milieus themselves, in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome. This shift has been analysed by Johan Andersson in his study on London's gay urban geography. He describes the change from dark, precluded gay pubs, often in areas associated with prostitution, to today's predominant image of Soho's "gay village": clean, open, bright cafés and bars, openly visible from the street – a shift, as he says, that is equally reflected in the names of bars such as

³⁶ Toby Helm. "Huhne says Hughes out of race." (*The Telegraph* 30/01/2006)

"Rupert Street" (the idea to have the gay scene "in the street") or "First Out".³⁷ Similar observations can be made about the other cities, Rome and Paris in particular. In Paris, the development of the Marais as an open, visible gay scene is similarly recent and reflected in the name of the centrally located "Open Café". In Rome, the "Coming Out" bar broke with the tradition of hidden gay bars such as the "Hangar", and gay and lesbian associations such as the Mario Mieli circle, where one needed to ring the bell and be identified before entering.³⁸ The "Coming Out" instead, located in visible access from a main road in a very central location, featuring rainbow colours and with young crowds gathering on the street pavements just outside of it, incarnates public homosexuality in an unprecedented way.

There is thus a clear connection between the norm that we are describing and the development of the field of the study itself. The frequenting of the type of bars and cafés where respondents have been recruited, to a large extent constitutes itself an act of subscribing to a certain degree of openness and "publicness" about homosexuality. On an analytical level, such circularity that links the change of the field itself to the change perceived within it poses some methodological problems. But I believe that the variety of angles from which the transformations have been looked at have provided a solid grounds for generalisations that bypass this methodological doubt. Thus, rather than blurring the findings from the field, the greater openness of the gay and lesbian scenes themselves add substantive support to the societal change towards a norm of publicly displayed homosexual identity.

6.3.3. Partnership and sexuality

While the identity constructed around secrecy seems to have lost grounds, the same decline is often equally claimed to have taken place concerning the homosexual identity based on sexual libertarianism and unbound promiscuity. This development, however, is often seen as referring mainly to gay men and more rarely to lesbian sexuality, as lesbian women were already seen as less sexually promiscuous. As Barbagli and Colombo point out:

³⁷ Johan Andersson analyses London's bar aesthetics in relation to the Aids pandemic, where cleanliness, light and openness suggest a healthy environment that breaks with the identification with disease. See: Johan Andersson. "Aids Stigma and Hygiene Aesthetics on London's Gay Scene in the 1980s and 1990s." Ben Campkin and Rosie Cox (eds.). *Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination*. (London: IB Tauris Publishing, 2007) (forthcoming). On p. 10 of the article, he quotes the Financial Times (1998) reporting on the Soho bar 'Rupert Street': "The cafe bar in Rupert Street is proud to put the clientele on display through clear, curtainless windows".

³⁸ Eleonora, Martina and Marina elaborate in depth on this point in the interview.

For this generation [gay men in the 1960s and 1970s], casual sex constituted a reference and a resource for their identity. But, from the period between the late 80s and the early 90s, the historical and cultural framework in which homosexual men moved changes again, and the new generation seeks also other instruments for the legitimization of their desire.³⁹

With data at hand, this development is shown to have been to a large extent a reaction to the advent of AIDS in the 1980s.⁴⁰ In a large quantitative analysis of gay sexual behaviour in France, Michael Bochow et al. point to a similar, in particular generational change in sexual behaviour as a consequence of AIDS, with the rising importance of the monogamous partnership model. However, they underline that this development is often relative, in that it is mostly altered with age and with the duration of the partnership, on the one hand, and undermined by a new rise in multi-partnership during the early 1990s, on the other.⁴¹

But they equally point to a strong rise in the proportion of those who "declare to be looking for a stable relationship, as they were 18% in 1985 and are 59% in 1997, which no doubt corresponds to an evolution of the social acceptance of homosexuality, rendered concrete for example through the possibility for homosexual to sign a Pacs."⁴² While a direct link is thus suggested between the legal recognition of partnership and the significant rise in the declared aim of stable relationships, we can speak of a broader social trend of homosexual to see a stable relationship as an aim. It is however interesting to note the much clearer evidence in the *declared aims* of the respondents as compared to the factual relationship practice found in the samples, which instead remains remarkably stable, at least since the end of the 1980s.⁴³ These findings confirm the overall picture of a dominant partnership norm in the fieldwork for this study, as far as the respondents' projects and aspirations are concerned, alongside a very diverse and often multi-partner sexual behaviour in practice (particularly for the male respondents, see chapter 4.4).

³⁹ Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*: 115, my translation.

⁴⁰ Ibid: 111-116

⁴¹ Michael Bochow, Marie Jauffret-Roustide, Alice Michel and Marie-Ange Schiltz. "Les évolutions des comportements sexuels et les modes de vie à travers les enquêtes réalisées dans la presse gay en France (1985-2000)." Broqua, Lert and Souteyrand, eds. (2003), *Homosexualités au temps du sida*. See p. 41, referring to *Enquêtes Presse Gay*.

⁴² Ibid: 40 Original: "[...] déclarent rechercher une relation stable, puisqu'ils étaient 18% en 1985 et sont 59% en 1997, ce qui correspond sans doute à une évolution de l'acceptation sociale de l'homosexualité, concrétisée par exemple par la possibilité pour les homosexuels de recourir au PaCS."

⁴³ Ibid: The results here show that between 1985 and 2000, the proportion of gay men in stable relationships oscillates between 49 and 58% without indicating a clear trend. Within relationships, the proportion of exclusive (as opposed to open) relationships increases in 1987 (from 17 to 26% of the whole sample) to fall again in 1997 and 2000 (22 and 19%).

The representation of partnership and the desire to form long-term relationships is one that is very present in sociological work on homosexuality-related topics, and in various form of media presence, from film to TV and literature. In a semi-sociological collection of lesbian and gay partnership narratives, significantly entitled *Matrimonio* ("Marriage", 2004), Piergiorgio Paterlini from the first sentence comments: "Gays and lesbians today dream of marriage." ("Gli omosessuali, le lesbiche, oggi, sognano il matrimonio.")⁴⁴ In this quote, again, "dreaming" refers primarily to the aspiration and long-term projects. Interestingly, he thereby justifies his choice of topic after a more generally sexuality centred successful enquiry entitled *Ragazzi che amano ragazzi*, ("Boys who love boys", 1991)⁴⁵ which, through the plural form, had made a reference to sexual behaviour beyond the idea of a committed partnership.

Paterlini, in telling the stories of ten lesbian and gay couples, places the analogy of marriage both in a historical context, in other terms as being nothing new, and highlights the trend to partnership as an "epochal change": "Actually, they always married. [...] That existed also when gay marriage "was not yet trendy". [...] But today it's different - culturally, sociologically, anthropologically different. Today we are at the beginning of an epochal change that, precisely for that concerns in a very particular way the new generations."⁴⁶

While we have found evidence of the "partnership project" to be a dominant norm in the gay and lesbian milieus of the four cities, how should we account for the apparent contradiction this represents to the "norm of promiscuity" often referred to in the interviews that respondents have identified with the gay and (to a lesser extent, but also) lesbian milieu?

First, as we have seen, both are not mutually exclusive. Quite often, stable, committed partnerships can be accompanied by a promiscuous, multi-partner behaviour over time. Concerning this possibility, we have looked at discourses that argue for an open negotiation of sexual promiscuity besides a long-term relationship, as well as secret sexual affairs. In this respect, respondents tell of the temptations the gay and lesbian scene offers (e.g. Flavio, Mimma, Stefan, Richard about his ex-boyfriend, Mathilde about her lover, Duncan about his ex-boyfriend).

⁴⁴ Piergiorgio Paterlini. *Matrimoni*. (Torino: Einaudi, 2004): vii

⁴⁵ Piergiorgio Paterlini. *Ragazzi che amano ragazzi*. (Torino: Einaudi, 1991)

⁴⁶ Paterlini (2004), *Matrimoni*: vii. Original: "Si sono sempre sposati, in realtà. [...] C'era che anche quando il matrimonio gay "non era ancora di moda". [...] Ma oggi è diverso. Culturalmente, sociologicamente, antropologicamente diverso. Oggi siamo agli inizi di un passaggio epocale che, proprio per questo, riguarda in modo del tutto particolare le nuove generazioni."

Yet again, greater acceptance of homosexuality goes in hand with larger gay and lesbian scenes, and thus more "temptations" as to the growth of the sexual market, so to speak. The partnership norm and the promiscuity norm, on the increase after a decline in the early period of the AIDS epidemic, thereby partly seem to be contradicting one another – they constitute references that respondents refer to, sometimes underlining the difficulty and contradictory nature with regret. Angelo for example describes the promiscuity created by the freedoms within a "ghetto" culture, and points to the idea that legal recognition may change such a loose sexual behaviour:

Angelo (Rome, 29)

It's very complicated, because I think that in a gay life, the fact that we are oppressed, that we are nevertheless living a parallel life, in a parallel universe, allows us to do anything. I mean often, paradoxically, we have unrestricted freedom, because it is a hidden life, under cover, that no one knows. So we can get away with anything. I mean, if I fuck you today, tomorrow I don't even greet you. Instead, probably, legal, formal recognition that is open to everyone could lead us to a, in inverted commas, more 'usual' situation, I mean [one] that is more regularized, more recognized. The fact that today, we live a life that is not recognized much, because we don't have formal recognition, makes us live with complete freedom, without limits, without restrictions. It's easy that from one day to another I leave you, I take you, I dump you; tomorrow I go with that one and so on, because obviously we live with the desire to know all of them, because we live in a ghetto. Instead, with formal recognition it would be an opening up to the world. So it would allow us for being more recognized, together, calmer - more relaxed.⁴⁷

The liberty of the gay "ghetto", according to Angelo, can be highly problematic or destructive. He sees the gay subculture as one in which promiscuous sexual encounters do not create social bonds. Angelo here frames the view of gay and lesbian norms as living in the "ghetto", and balances the freedoms such a life at the margins of society permits with the deficit of not being "recognized", "regularized", "calm", "relaxed". The latter positive terms are associated with his hope for "legal recognition". "Hidden" life and the marginal creativity associated with it. As becomes clear, such a shift from liberty in a marginal community to regulation through the inclusion into mainstream social norms forms a heated ideological debate, often described as the "normalization" debate in the literature on homosexuality. The next section will turn to this

⁴⁷ Original: "E' molto complicato. Perché io penso che nella vita omosessuale, il fatto che noi siamo repressi, - che comunque viviamo in un - una vita parallela, un universo parallelo - ci consente tutto quanto. Cioè, spesso, noi paradossalmente abbiamo una libertà illimitata. Perché è una vita nascosta, sotto le righe, che nessuno conosce. Quindi ci possiamo permettere tutto quanto. Cioè, io oggi ti scopo, domani neanche ti saluto. Invece, probabilmente, un riconoscimento legale, formale, aperto a tutti quanti potrebbe portarci a una situazione più, tra virgolette, consueta. Cioè, che è più regolarizzata, più riconosciuta. Cioè, il fatto che noi adesso viviamo una vita che è poco riconosciuta, perché non c'abbiamo riconoscimenti legali, ci porta a vivere in maniera completamente libera. Senza vincoli, senza restrizioni. Cioè, è facile che da un giorno a un altro, io ti lascio, ti prendo, ti mollo, domani vado con questo, et cetera. Perché, ovviamente viviamo nella voglia di conoscere tutti quanti, perché

debate, outlining the main arguments it involves. It will however, at this stage, not be fully engaged with on the normative level. Instead, the different perspectives that the normalisation debate offer on the transformations we have been looking at will be described and the question of generational change will be reviewed in this respect.

6.4. Inclusion, normalization and the "new generation"

To what extent does the acceptance of homosexuality represent an inclusion into mainstream societal norms, and how should such a development be judged? If there is such a shift, does it occur within gay and lesbian attitudes towards the couple and the management of public identities? Can this latter shift be identified in a generational pattern? These very broad questions will be briefly turned to here before the idea of validation through the law will be analysed concerning the case of parenting projects.

6.4.1. Normalization

The debate about normalisation (which we have briefly mentioned in chapter 2 concerning the representation and definition of homosexuality) witnesses the clash of two views, promoted by thinkers or activists, mainly within the gay and lesbian movement itself. In the first, it is argued that gay and lesbian culture should not be merged into (unjust or outdated) societal structures, but should instead remain political, innovative and creative through its challenges to mainstream norms, such as by transgressing sexual norms of privacy or monogamy. This view is often linked to a "queer theory" perspective that criticises social norms of mainstream society, particularly concerning gender, sexuality and (economic and other) domination.⁴⁸ The second instead heralds the inclusion into society, including access to marriage and parenting, as a happy ending of a path towards equality – sometimes including the idea, and indeed wish, that excesses such as concerning sexual promiscuity or clubbing and drinking culture associated with the marginal status, will cease through it. This debate can be exemplified in

siamo in un ghetto. Invece, probabilmente, un riconoscimento formale sarebbe anche un'apertura al mondo. Quindi ci consentirebbe di essere più riconosciuti, insieme, più calmi, più tranquilli."

⁴⁸ Often based on Foucault, particularly: Judith Butler, David Halperin. As Warner says: "[queer theory] rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favour of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal." Michael Warner. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993): XXVI. On these debates, see also Bersani (1995), *Homos* and Eric Fassin on interpretations and misinterpretations of Foucault's ideas in Eric Fassin, "Lieux d'invention. L'amitié, le mariage et la famille." (*Vacarme* 29, 2004: 120-123)

the debate between Andrew Sullivan, who advocates gay marriage on these latter grounds, and Michael Warner's criticism of a pro-marriage position he sees as conservative.⁴⁹

Within these debates, thus, the desire to form stable relationships which has been examined up to this point has often been referred to in those terms, as the *normalization* of homosexuality. But as we have seen, normalization can take many forms. Indeed, in many analyses of the normalization of homosexuality, the concept has been used in fundamentally different and sometimes contradicting ways, mostly including

- 1) the adaptation of gays and lesbians to heterosexual societal standards, in particular monogamous partnership models⁵⁰
- 2) the increasing acceptance and social legitimacy of homosexual life styles within mainstream society⁵¹

It is not feasible to explore all perspectives in the normalization debate here.⁵² However, in the context of what we have looked at, it seems that we should place the concept of *normalization* at the level of both symbolic acceptance and the couple imagery, a twofold development which has had an important effect for gays and lesbians in their construction of identity. It seems indeed that an increase of the couple imagery exists, an imagery that has been provided a fundamental backing with the creation of the new legal options in various European countries.

Also, as has been noted, one could tentatively claim that through this process of social change, which is omnipresent in the discourses encountered within this study, the construction of gay and lesbian identities has become less connected to the idea of a subversive sub-culture. Despite continuing resistance and discrimination, the recognition on the symbolic level which we have referred to implies that homosexuality is no longer lived as being "us" (lesbians and gays) against "them" (a hostile society). Instead, discrimination is experienced as more

⁴⁹ Andrew Sullivan. "The marriage moment." (*The Advocate*, 20 January 1998: 61-6). Also: Warner's critique: Michael Warner. "Normal and normaller – beyond gay marriage." (*GLQ – A journal of lesbian and gay studies* 5, 2, 1999: 119-171). For a comparative analysis of the US context of this debate, see also Fassin (2001), "Same Sex, Different Politics", pp. 221-223.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Broqua and de Busscher's interpretation of the effect of "semi-reconnaissance" (half-recognition) through the Pacs, C. Broqua and de Busscher (2003), "La crise de la normalisation.": 27ff.

⁵¹ For an analysis of this perspective on normalization see e.g. Henning Bech. "After the Closet." (*Sexualities* 2, 3, 1999: 343-346) Compare also charter 2.

differentiated according to specific people, groups and institutions. Thereby, at least to a certain extent, stigma and secrecy give way to a “legitimate” choice in the construction of public gay and lesbian identities.

It is in this sense that we can speak of a *normalization* process: Instead of the taboo of homosexuality, many lesbians and gays find themselves confronted with new models of identity construction. Socially and legally, the recognition of same-sex couples has reinforced the imagery of the stable couple – publicly displayed, monogamous and linked to the tradition of the romantic love marriage. This image does not necessarily represent an affirmation of what gays and lesbians are like; instead, it has established itself as a central norm of reference. Surely, other references have not ceased to exist, and the couple norm is often either rejected or treated ironically or yet again re-appropriated in various ways. Lived realities are far more diverse than this, but at the symbolic and the referential level, this aspect of *normalization* seems to take place. Thereby, to a certain extent, the secret and the taboo have often moved from being linked to homosexuality as such, to specific choices of sexuality and intimacy (such as arguably casual sex, unfaithfulness, large age differences, cruising and sex in public, fetish etc.). It needs to be seen whether what we could call a historical moment of the recognition of same-sex partnership as a norm of reference will be upheld, grow throughout society, or decline again once the novelty of the wedding bells has lost its appeal.

In sum, legal recognition of same-sex couples has been linked to the question of the social acceptance of homosexuality and the construction of gay and lesbian identities. Methodological and conceptual considerations on recognition, identity and homosexuality have been combined with a tentative reading of interview material from fieldwork in gay and lesbian bars of London, Paris, Berlin and Rome.

It has been argued that various forms of identity management have to be taken into account to understand the different ways in which public and private identities are constructed according to both social constraints and ideological choices. In this context, the legal partnership option can be considered one further feature of a construction of public identity. While an overall unanimous approval of a trend towards legal partnership recognition has been observed, personal attitudes to the use to be made of it vary greatly, within a spectrum that goes from the

⁵² It may be criticised that the queer theory perspective in particular has come short in the analysis, despite the obvious relevance of the debate it represents. This however has been a consequence to an otherwise wide analytical angle that has been cast here – a choice that may be complemented in various ways.

embracing of traditional marriage perspectives to the rejecting of couple life on the whole. The recognition of same-sex partnership, while mostly linked to an overall greater acceptance of homosexuality *per se* in the discourses encountered, equally and foremost represents the recognition of a public partnership norm that can in some cases undermine choices of identity such as those related to secrecy.

In the field studied here, it seems a commonplace to say that on the symbolic level, homosexuality has become far more accepted within recent years. For the individuals' concrete lives, however, the negotiations of intimacy and management of identity continue to move between the secret, the private and the public, according to the different social realities encountered.

In this sense, the pictures have the potential to force the constitution of the self into a new "project". In accepting such a description of the interplay between images and the self, the shifting norms and changing images around conceptions of homosexuality and the couple would be expected to have a sweeping impact on life projects and the self-conceptions of the individuals concerned. In the discourses throughout the fieldwork, the changing images have been viewed as either comforting a desired identity construction ("open", "out", "commitment"), or as challenging certain public and private identities ("a mistake"). Thus, one cannot speak of the recognition of homosexual identity as such in a one-dimensional sense. Instead, the recognition of certain norms of "public" identities and of committed partnership constitute a fundamental transformation of the normative environment. It is clear that the change that is viewed as a symbolic appreciation of gay and lesbian life choices throughout society, on television, in political debates etc., has equally had an impact on the potentiality of self-construction and life projects. This image does not necessarily represent an affirmation of what gays and lesbians are like; instead, it has established itself as a central norm of reference. Surely, other references have not ceased to exist, and the norms of being "public" and of the couple can also be rejected or treated ironically or yet again re-appropriated in various ways. Lived realities are far more diverse than this. But at the symbolic and the referential level, this aspect of *normalization* seems to take place.

New deviance?

Another perspective on this process of transformation is given by Eric Fassin, who in a side-note quotes Daniel Borillo's view that from the homosexual as a deviant, the attention has turned to the figure of the homophobe, who, as a consequence of the inclusion of homosexuality into mainstream societal norms has become "marginal" or possibly "deviant" in this respect:

We will however try to show here that [question of homosexuality] today poses itself in a radically new manner. The lawyer Daniel Borillo [...] suggests that we assist an overturn: "Instead of dedicating ourselves to the study of homosexual behaviour, which, in the past, was treated as deviant, the stronger attention is from now on paid to the reasons that have led to consider this form of sexuality as deviant. [...] [I]t is no longer the question of homosexuality [...] but clearly the question of homophobia that henceforth merits particular analysis."⁵³

There is some truth in this shift towards viewing the homophobe as standing at odds to a generally accepted norm of acceptance within an open society, being equated to the racist, xenophobe, sexist or anti-Semite in current anti-discrimination policies.⁵⁴

But such a view can be characterised as overly optimistic, on the one hand, or as limited to a range of liberal-minded social settings, on the other. Indeed, in consequence to the new image of the homosexual that has been established in the Western world, through the media-presentation of the "modern homosexual" (to employ Barbagli's terminology), a new image has equally been provided for virulent opponents of such a development, where the image has become an incarnation of "non-tradition", Western society, of "Western decadence", economic liberalism, or of secularism. The force of the image and its association with worldviews that have become increasingly contentious for many in recent years has increased homophobia in religious societies, in the poorest countries in the world – which could explain the virulence of homophobic sentiments in poor post-colonial societies, in which ironically the oppression of

⁵³ Fassin (2005), *L'inversion*: p. 162: Original: "On tentera pourtant de montrer ici qu'elle [la question homosexuelle] se pose aujourd'hui de manière radicalement renouvelée. Le juriste Daniel Borillo [...] suggère que nous assistons à un renversement : « Au lieu de se consacrer à l'étude du comportement homosexuel, traité dans le passé comme déviant, l'attention est désormais portée sur les raisons qui ont mené à considérer cette forme de sexualité comme déviante. [...] [C]e n'est plus la question homosexuelle [...] mais bien la question homophobe qui mérite dorénavant une problématisation particulière."

⁵⁴ As an illustration of this, the example of UK anti-discrimination policy can be given, with consequences for a "homophobic" Tory councillor, as *The Guardian* commented: "Tory councillor Peter Willows is facing prosecution under section 5 of the Public Order Act amid claims that he told prominent members of [Brighton's] gay community that he thought homosexuals were paedophiles. [...] [T]hough he has sought to head off the row with a clarification and an apology he will nevertheless also have to endure his day in court. If convicted he could face a maximum jail term of up to six months or a 2,000 pounds fine." Hugh Muir. "Diary." (*The Guardian* 26/7/2006), online version.

homosexuality had been introduced by the colonial powers, particularly in the British Empire. It can equally account for the increased role played by anti-homosexual positions combined with anti-liberalism by the Catholic Church or within countries that strongly identify with it, such as Poland, other Christian traditions such as radical Christians in the US, in Muslim countries, Muslim minorities, in some countries within disparaged working class environments⁵⁵ and so on. In other words, through the spotlight, homosexuals have also become a target in broad cultural conflicts in which, unintentionally, they have become a symbol.

It needs to be seen whether what we could call the historical moment of the recognition of same-sex partnership and public "openness" as a norm of reference will be upheld, grow throughout society, or decline again once the novelty of the debates has lost its appeal, or to what extent indeed, more pessimistically, homophobia could continue to increase in parts of society and a wide range of countries.

However, for now, we will return to the specific environments we have been looking at in this study, and consider the effect such a shift and the transformed images of homosexuality and their acceptance has on younger generations. A generational shift in constructing gay and lesbian identities has been hinted at a bit earlier in this chapter, as well as in chapter 4. Should a completely new approach to the construction of gay and lesbian identities thus be understood as a generational shift?

6.4.2. New norms and generational shifts

As we have seen, several analytical perspectives pointed in the direction of the "couple moment". Some were visible in the discourses encountered, and as some literature suggests, a generational element needs to be noted. Younger lesbians and gays seem to name long-term partnership commitments more spontaneously something they would aim for. The generational arguments, as has been discussed, should always be regarded with some suspicion, and some conclusions seem to be made too quickly. A diversification of the age range in the sample had

⁵⁵ In Eastern Germany, the trend indicates an increasingly hostile opinion about homosexuality as a lifestyle ("quite bad" or "very bad" for 24% in 2002, up from 17% in 2000 for East Germany, see *Datenreport 2004*, Teil 2, Statistisches Bundesamt, Berlin: 471). In the German context, this trend correlates with these regions being the most economically marginalised, poor regions in the country, with the highest unemployment, and high anti-liberal opinion – this example could thus provide an (very tentative) additional case that is not based on religion

consciously been aimed for in the fieldwork conducted here. But a lot of the difference in discourses between "older" and "younger" respondents refers not so much to generational social change, i.e. the different normative horizons of respondents due to the period they grew up in, but to a large extent to their phase of life. In other terms, young people may be more enthusiastic about committed partnership, independent of the difference of social norms between the 1950s and the 1990s, to name two different "generations" in that sense. But this caution considered, let us nevertheless take a look at what could be said about a "new" generation in gay and lesbian identity construction.

A general trend towards an easier and less conflictual approach to publicly lesbian or gay identities can be found in a range of studies, such as in Barbagli and Colombo's quantitative analysis, in which "kissing in public" is practiced in significantly higher proportion the younger the respondents are: 50% of gay men under 24 as compared to only 18% over 35, and 67% of women under 24 as opposed to only 37% over 35 say to often kiss in public.⁵⁶ One may again wonder to what extent this is related to a life phase, in that kissing in public may be more challenging or interesting to the younger respondents. However, such findings seem to confirm a general trend.

Various discourses in the fieldwork show that respondents equally observe such a generational shift, in all four cities, as we have seen in some extracts about social change in 4.2, Hans, for example, himself in his late 40s, sees a generational difference in that the younger ones see their affirmation in public as much more "taken for granted":

Hans (Berlin)

I have never, or in very, very rare cases, received any kind of hostilities, be it because I was arm in arm with my boyfriend or kissing somewhere in public - neither abroad nor here in Berlin. [...] It depends a bit on the self-assuredness that one brings along. [...] It's a development, I think, that is much more being taken for granted today, and because many more young people do it. [...] But also when I [look] at those whom I know, particularly also my younger friends who had their coming out with their families, there it has always been the case that now even the grandparents accepted it with much less trouble, all the relatives had much less trouble with it, just as the parents.⁵⁷

or nationality, that homophobia and anti-liberalism can be seen as tending to correlate in very different contexts, and that "losers" in liberalised economies can tend to appropriate the image of the homosexual as a scapegoat.

⁵⁶ Barbagli and Colombo (2001), *Omosessuali moderni*: 209

⁵⁷ Original: "Ich hab da noch nie irgendwie, oder in ganz ganz seltenen Fällen, Feindseligkeiten irgendwie entgegengebracht bekommen, weil ich mit meinem Freund irgendwie Arm in Arm oder knutschend irgendwo in der Öffentlichkeit war, sowohl im Ausland nicht als auch in Berlin. [...] Das liegt so n bisschen an dem Selbstverständnis, ne, was man also damit rüberbringt. [...] Das ist ne Entwicklung, glaub ich, [die] heute einfach auch viel selbstverständlicher geworden ist, ne, und es viel mehr junge Typen auch machen. [...] Aber, auch so wenn ich in meinem Umkreis, gerade an jüngeren Freunden, die also ihr Outing gemacht haben in der Familie, da

We have seen Hans's view of the younger generation, as having less problems with public affirmation of homosexuality. And this refers both to their own "understanding of themselves" ("Selbstverständnis") to see, for example, affection in a public setting such as in the street as "natural" ("selbstverständlich": "natural" or "self-explanatory"), and to the lower degree of problematic reactions to their "coming out", such as in the reaction from their parents. Reflexively, thus, a social change within the individual and in their immediate social environment have taken place, particularly for the younger generation who has been socialized into seeing homosexuality and public affection as something natural that should not encounter problems in public.

Elena refers to the younger generation and to the generally growing number of gays and lesbians in locations such as the "gay village" in Rome:

Elena (Rome, 31)

E: The kids now of 20 years, 18 years, [...] girls as much as guys, and guys even more so, but the girls as well - it's something I have observed, as much at the [gay] beach as at the Gay Village, as much as in pubs, gay bars, isn't it? - They are much more self-conscious I would say. There is much more of a relaxed attitude. Last week I was talking to a girl who is now 20. I got to know her when she was a little girl, well because let's say she is the niece of a friend of mine. I met her here and I was really surprised. So I told her, well, "But how did it go, how are you, does your mum know, does your dad know?" - "Yes, yes, yes they know, I told them that if it was ok with them, that's the way it is, and if not, well never mind." Talking about their identity without, without problems. And I was very happy about that! Because if we talk about people who maybe today are 30, or 40, no rather 40 or 50, maybe they still lived it much worse. With more closed-mindedness e so I think that slowly-slowly we will really get to, - well, to live their homosexuality being at ease about it. That's it.

FJ: And if you say they are being more relaxed than the others, so instead how do you think that people react, parents and so on, friends, do you think there wouldn't be problems, or ...

F: Less compared to before, less for sure. Less. I think that slowly, slowly [...] it will be more accepted. Also because in numbers, I mean visible, the visible homosexuals are many, many more. There are people who perhaps before were hiding, who today [are] relaxed, [that] it's not an issue.⁵⁸

war das immer auch so, dass die Großeltern das noch, noch viel unkomplizierter aufgenommen hat, und die Verwandtschaft meist viel unkomplizierter aufgenommen hat, wie die Eltern."

⁵⁸ Original: "E: I ragazzetti adesso di vent'anni, di diciotto anni, [...] sia le ragazze che i ragazzi, i ragazzi ancora di più. Ma le ragazze anche. E una cosa che ho osservato in giro, sia al livello di, di spiaggia che al livello di Gay Village, che al livello di pub, locali gay, no? Sono molto più sereni. Sereni, sereni insomma. C'è proprio molta più tranquillità. Io, la scorsa settimana parlavo con una ragazza, che adesso c'ha vent'anni. Che io l'ho conosciuta quando era più piccolina perchè la, diciamo ch'è la nipote di un mio amico, insomma L'ho ritrovata qui e sono rimasta stupita. Allora gli ho detto, eh, insomma, ma com'è andata, come va, mamma lo sa? Pappà lo sa? - Sì sì sì, loro lo sanno, io glielo detto, se vi va bene, è così, altrimenti è uguale. Quindi proprio con molto tranquillità hanno, tirano fuori insomma, Parlano della loro identità senza problemi. E questo fa molto piacere! Perchè se parliamo di gente che magari adesso c'ha trenta, quarant'anni, no anzi, quaranta cinquanta, forse l'hanno vissuto ancora peggio. Con più chiusura e. Quindi penso che piano piano si andrà proprio verso, - insomma, vivere con tranquillità la loro omosessualità. Questo.

FJ: E se diciamo loro sono più sereni che quelli, e invece pensi come reagisca poi la gente, i genitori, loro genitori et cetera, gli amici, pensi che non ci siano tanti problemi, oppure ...

These extracts, Hans's and Elena's, are in line with many of the social progress discourses we have looked at in chapter 4. The focus here, however, has been on the change within, where a new kind of conception of gay and lesbian identities is at stake that is much less concerned with the idea of a conflict with the close social environment and society at large. Elena's account is interesting here both in that we have seen that such an observation is present for cities as culturally diverse as Berlin and Rome, in these two cases, and that she refers both to societal observations and to a specific case, her friends' niece whom she encountered in a gay venue and proved to be at complete ease with her affirmed sexual identity. Noting such a difference to her own attitude, being just 31 years old herself she expresses both "astonishment" and "happiness" about such a generational change.

In this respect, we can again look at Ritch-Savin Williams generational study.⁵⁹ He defends the idea of an overall generational shift that sees the emergence of a gay teenager generation that does not live the conflictual aspect of homosexuality in the same way anymore. The demise of labels such as "gay" and "lesbian", according to Ritch-Savin Williams' analysis, are to be seen as an entire paradigm shift that makes the categories porous: "Some assimilate, and some accommodate. Some embrace gayness, and some refuse it. It's just that the old categories of gay and lesbian don't fit anymore."⁶⁰

He sees the teenager generation as much more at ease to experience sexuality and transgressing borders than with the labeling as gay or lesbian. This development is seen as one in which homosexual identity has gained some "banality" in a positive sense.⁶¹ This banality can also be described as a consumeristic attitude towards identity construction, which indeed is portrayed as conflicting with a political meaning of sexual orientation, which in this study is seen as central to the previous generation:

Abie and Penny, by contrast, are young women of the twenty-first century, a time when change and inconsistency are the norms. They and their friends, some of whom regularly hook up with guys, watch TV shows like *Queer as Folk*, *Totally Gay*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *The L-Word*, and reruns of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. They watch these shows not for the political message or social commentary, but for the humor, the fashion tips, and the music. Abie and Penny are the new face of what may be called the disappearing gay adolescent. ... Maybe they are the new gay adolescent. [In contrast,] Scott and Mike and their gay male friends, now in

E: Meno rispetto al passato sicuramente meno. Meno. Penso che piano piano, [...] verrà più accettata insomma. Anche perchè al livello numerico, eh, - cioè, visibili, cioè, gli omosessuali visibili sono molti molti di più. C'è gente che prima magari si nascondeva, adesso tranquillamente: non è [più] un caso."

⁵⁹ Savin-Williams (2005), *The New Gay Teenager*: 12

⁶⁰ Ibid: 222

⁶¹ Ibid: 222f

their mid-thirties, do not understand Abie and Penny. ... Scott is alarmed by the matter-of-fact appearance of gay characters in mainstream television and appalled by the political poverty of it all.

The "normalcy" of different sexual identities is portrayed as somewhat being taken for granted by Abie and Penny, where a variety of images concerning homosexual life is part of the mainstream culture they take part in. The allegedly a-political nature of these representations is seen as problematic by those of the "older" generation because it is unconnected from the experience of conflict and discrimination.

However, in line with what we have seen so far, this analysis should be taken with some care about its validity. Growing acceptance is not universal, and, on the contrary, some from the older generation do not refer to conflicts in their own identity construction at a younger age (e.g. Hans, Dominique, Patrick).

6.4.3. Ambivalence and contradictions

One key aspect of homosexual identities has been seen in the very experience of being marginal and transgressive, or, as in Didier Eribon's terms, based on the experience of the "insult".⁶² The description of a generational shift that has been described in the previous section would thus imply that this is no longer the case. However, there is a lot of ambivalence and in placing homosexuality within society at large, for most, homosexual identities are still seen as being against the norm. Thus, the symbolic acceptance leads to an ambivalent situation where homosexuality is simultaneously placed within the norm (there is no longer a good reason to hide it and the "homophobe" is a deviant figure) and against the norm (it still represents a marginal identity). The idea of constructing homosexual identities "against" society has not disappeared. Indeed, the difficulty of positioning themselves in a context that is still experienced as discriminatory in many respects is often combined with the view that there has been a symbolic societal acceptance.

This double positioning of the homosexual can be illustrated in an extract from the focus group in the Parisian gay and lesbian youth group MAG. Here, similar to Savin-William's study, a specific generational angle had stood at the foreground when directing the focus group discussion.

Concerning the question of publicly displaying affection to a partner, 18-year-old Cédric describes a mixed picture of “surprise” about those who did not accept public display of affection, and bravery to “emmerder” society. Cédric, Bastien and Han, in a group interview at a lesbian and gay youth group in Paris, present a picture where society presents obstacles to their sexual identities, but they see themselves as the ones mastering the situation. It seems that while some people oppose it, it is really them, the younger ones, who are in tune with what is appropriate in society:

Focus group (Paris) extract: Cédric (18), Bastien (20), Han (26)

C: Yes, [slightly ironic:] I don't yet know this conflict at the moment, even if I am not there anymore. But it's true that people's reactions are surprising. I mean, some will welcome you with open arms. And with others it's, it's rather, - [imitating a disgusted voice:] bah, they are kissing, argh, they are holding hands.

H: But there you are speaking of people you know or people you are crossing in the street for example?

C: People I cross in the street and those I know as well.

FJ: For example? Could you give an example of some you know?

C: My father.

FJ: Your father?

C: Exactly. And for him, it's out of the question.

FJ: Why, what does he say?

C: Well he say, well I can't even bring a male friend to the house anymore, because he gets all these thoughts about it.

B: Yes. Yeah ok.

FJ: So you live at home?

C: No, not anymore. But it's true, it's rather surprising.

FJ: Mm.

C: The kind of reactions. But it's nevertheless difficult, well, at least for me, because before, it's not been that long that I want to be out in public, but it's small things when you are with someone, a smile, a look, the desire to be affectionate, that you see straight couples do and that you want to do to your boyfriend too. And for reasons of societal morals, we don't do. Well, I say, bah, fuck that society, we do it anyway.⁶³

⁶² Eribon (1999), *Réflexions*: “Un monde d’injures” (29-201)

⁶³ Original: “C: Oui, [un peu ironique :] je connais encore ce conflit en ce moment, même si je n’y suis plus, mais. C’est vrai que la réaction des gens, c’est surprenant. Je veux dire, certains vont t’accueillir à bras ouverts. Et d’autres c’est, - c’est assez, ben, - [imitant une voix dégoûtée :] ah, ils s’embrassent, oh, ils se tiennent pas la main.

H: Mais tu parles de gens là, que tu fréquentes vraiment ou de gens que tu croises dans la rue par exemple ?

C: Des gens que je croise dans la rue ou que je fréquente aussi.

FJ: Par exemple ? Tu pourrais donner un exemple de quelqu’un que tu connais ?

C: Mon père.

FJ: Ton père ?

C: Voilà. Et lui, c’est hors de question.

FJ: Pourquoi, qu’est-ce qu’il dit ?

C: Ben il dit, euh, ben je peux même plus amener un ami de sexe masculin quoi, à la maison. Parce qu’il, il se construit des idées.

B: Ouais. Ouais d’accord. -

FJ: Et donc tu vis chez tes parents ? -

C: Non. Plus maintenant. - Mais c’est vrai. C’est assez surprenant.

FJ: Mm.

C: La réaction. - Mais, - c’est quand même dur de, - enfin pour moi ça a été dur, eh, parce qu’avant, ça fait pas très longtemps que, que j’ai envie d’être visible, - mais c’est - y a des petits trucs dans un couple qui, - un sourire, un regard, d’un, l’envie de faire des gestes de tendresse. Que tu vois, que tu vois des gens, des couples hétéros le faire et que t’as envie de faire à ton copain, et pour des questions morales de société on, on le fait pas. Ben moi je dis, ouf, on l’emmerde cette société et on le fait.”

Cédric, 18, thinks that negative reactions concerning homosexuality, in the street or by his father, are "surprising", a word he uses twice in this passage to describe hostile reactions. His analysis is contradictory in that the surprising element of the reactions is one that is generalised to society on the whole. He asserts that his public identity is rather unmoved by the experience of negative comments, and he will not refrain from displaying it in public: "fuck that society, we do it anyway" ("on l'emmerde cette société et on le fait"). Two things are noteworthy here: First, Cédric, despite the inappropriateness of negative judgements ("surprising") seems to construct his identity *against society at large*.

A self-conscious desire of public identities is thus combined with an image of symbolic acceptance that views the non-accepting people in concrete social settings as standing at odds with today's social norms. But at the same time, the experience of the insult, of the necessity of a case-to-case management or being careful of "openness" in specific settings, remains an important element of identity experiences in most cases that we have concretely looked at. (See chapter 5, also Christophe, chapter 3: "You have to watch out about places. [...] In some neighbourhoods I think it's risky. [...] Even if society evolves, everybody isn't prepared to accept it. So, you have to be careful."⁶⁴).

Such ambivalence, while being embedded in a progress story and a higher degree of acceptance, can thus sometimes create further difficulty, when it implicitly requires openness in a potentially discriminatory environment. The strategic identity management in different social settings becomes principally inappropriate for many, but "openness" brings dangers and risks that are not always lived without conflicts. Choosing a particularly "accepting" social environment, such as the milieus that we have been looking at forms one of the viable ways out, but equally restrict the options of identity choices. In other terms, at least potentially, a clear definition of a homosexual identity may be required and thereby a sense of choosing one's geographical, professional or other life path accordingly.

Also, the analysis has shown a certain contradiction where in a new partnership norm has been described, but where at the same time, a trend towards a growing homosexual scene has been identified, with a growing offer of promiscuity and a greater attraction to live within a "gay ghetto" and a "promiscuity" norm in the "ghetto" as Angelo has called it.

⁶⁴ Original: "il faut faire gaffe aux endroits. [...] [D]ans certains quartiers, à mon avis, c'est prendre un risque, [...] Même si la société évolue, tout le monde n'est pas prêt à [...] l'accepter quoi. Donc, euh, faut faire attention."

These contradictions are the result of the process of intersecting norms in the transformations we have examined. The disappearance of such contradictions, in one way or the other, remains to be seen. What we have detected, instead, refers to a clear development and the growth of a range of norms on the symbolic level that make many homosexual lifestyle choices easier – but the transformations are not always, and not for everyone, as uniform, linear or clear as a progress and acceptance discourse may indicate.

Concerning the transformations on the legal level, however, the following two sections indicate a further perspective that streamlines the findings on the meaning legal recognition has for gay and lesbian life choices.

6.5. Validation of choices and the role of the law

In the previous sections, we have looked at the concept of pictures and the norms of partnership and openness concerning homosexuality, and at the broad generational shifts they represent. As we have seen, the new norms that are detected by sociologists and by a range of the respondents encountered for this study, create new spaces for identity constructions, are mostly welcomed with optimism about social progress: they are associated with the idea of democratization and liberalization. At the same time, they can challenge strategies of identity construction, or pose unprecedented difficulties when the need for openness is accompanied by continuing discrimination and risk to careers or respect from others.

A different perspective, complementary to the notion of pictures, can be provided by the notion of validation. As we will see, the idea of validation can help to focus on group recognition as well as on societal acceptance and on legal options in particular. It will prove particularly compelling to view the narratives of parenting projects and the legal recognition of homosexual parenting in the light of validation as a conceptual notion.

6.5.1. Validation

What we have framed through the analysis of pictures available to the individual on the symbolic level can equally be described as a process of validation. One useful reformulation of a social psychology terminology has been made in Ross Colquhoun and Brian Martin's

analysis of group validation in social movements⁶⁵ – a context that bears various parallels to lesbian and gay milieus. In their article, they critically review the role of the group in providing a validation of otherwise marginal discourses:

Most behaviour is not likely to bring about noticeable change in the world other than feedback from others, of which the most influential is feedback from those who are trusted. [...] [T]o deal with invalidation: they can find people who share similar constructs. They can find validation from these people. (p.2)

For our context and for the transformations that are addressed here, it is particularly important to see the possibility of validation both from a group (or, in our case within a certain milieu such as the metropolitan gay and lesbian one), and from society at large or the state, dependent on the context. Colquhoun and Martin refer to other forms of validation, which however are all linked to validating politically marginal discourses:

Although our focus here is on the role of groups in the validation of constructs, it is worth mentioning that validation can and does occur in other ways, including through individual interactions and networks, reading [...] and, in a few cases, independent thinking. However, the role of groups is an especially powerful method of validation. Depending on past experience and their ability to predict the likely response, individuals will tend to test new ideas within a trusted group to find validation. Either the group validates the new construct or, if not, the person is left to elaborate or change the construct, to seek to change the views of the group or to move to another group. (p. 6)

As we can see, there is a strong parallel to the description of pictures in the construction of identity. However, in a slightly different focus, the idea is not that much the patchwork that is creatively built by the individual. While such a construction can take place, the resulting views and narratives in turn need to encounter validation. In other terms, not only does the individual need to get ideas into what constructions of identity are possible, but equally requires others to judge the resulting patchwork as a valid one in order to avoid isolation or dysfunction:

The isolated individual is in danger of being rendered dysfunctional, branded as irrational and labelled insane or a criminal when they challenge the norms of a society, even in the face of obvious injustice and oppression. [...] We are after all social beings and without validation we cease to function effectively, not only to create change, but to preserve our personal integrity. The pressure on people to conform is very strong. It is a rare individual who risks their safety to oppose injustice and oppression. The most sensible way to do this is with the support of a group.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ross Colquhoun and Brian Martin. "Constructing social action." (*Philosophy and Social Action*, Vol. 27, No. 4, October-December 2001: 7-23). Online version at <http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/pubs/01psa.html> (page numbers taken from online version). They draw on personal construct theory and engage critically with George Kelly's work: "Personal construct theory is very much concerned with issues of dependency (the need for validation) and poses the concept of the person needing to receive validation from the environment in order to predict their future in spite of being stuck in a dysfunctional system." (p.3) See also George Kelly. *A theory of personality: the psychology of personal constructs*. (New York: Norton, 1995)

⁶⁶ Colquhoun Martin (2001), "Constructing social action": 11

This view thus allows for a coherent explanation both of an identification through a gay and lesbian milieu, and thus against mainstream societal norms, and the identification with newly accepted norms on the symbolic level of society and in law. These two alternatives, of creating a homosexual identity against society or in tune with societal recognition is often encountered in the interviews, and most often both ideas are intertwined. While the "group" is often judged as necessary, it is equally criticized and perceived "homosexual norms" are seen as undesirable by many. The possibility of validation through mainstream society represents greater freedoms from group pressure, but less freedom through the loss of the marginal space the "gay world". The space opened up by being cast outside mainstream society, is indeed described by some respondents as a great liberty that is associated with gay and lesbian culture.

6.5.2. Validation and innovation

This perspective casts a new light on the question of how partnership projects are constructed with a validating reference either to perceived mainstream societal norms or in the context of a group reference within which different normative validation discourses apply. Indeed, the absence of societal and legal recognition of same-sex partnership has often been seen as a reason for freedom at the margins, innovation in conceiving of new models of intimacy, or, in other terms, of specific lesbian and gay references to models of intimacy and commitment.

Inventing or copying models of intimacy

The meaning of unofficial ceremonies has given rise to several sociological studies on "commitment" ceremonies or couple blessings.⁶⁷ The cultural meaning of such rites is particularly explicit where, as often in the work on this subject, the ritualising of a relationship that is precisely linked to a lack of public institutionalisation, where this latter term can be taken in both a social and a legal meaning. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan describe this contrast at the beginning of their analysis entitled "Affirming commitment":

The variety of ways of signalling heterosexual commitment, from the private affirmation of friendship and love to the legal and sacramental bonds of marriage, are generally accompanied by some sort of public recognition. In general, non-heterosexuals lack such a formal imprimatur, and more specifically, they are excluded from the ritual approval represented by marriage.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Kathleen Hull. *Wedding Rites/Marriage Rights. The cultural politics of same-sex marriage*. (PhD, Northwestern University, 2001)

⁶⁸ Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2000), *Same-Sex Intimacies*: 127

Weeks et al define families of choice as such a model of intimacy. In the introduction, they refer to a magazine headline "knit your own life" to underline the idea of self-constructed norms in intimacy construction. This view parallels Giddens view of intimacy and modernity, where the element of choice and equality transcends social structures. Giddens has described the potential of innovation and transformation for gays and lesbians, who can be described, as it were, as particularly modern in their tendency to construct their own lives according to individual choices.⁶⁹

Two narratives about the family can serve to illustrate this point, but equally undermine the individually innovative aspect of such a formulation of how partnership perspectives are validated by reference norms.

In the first interview extract, Olivier makes a clear reference to the idea that in a homosexual context, for him, family means that he has reconstructed a family of choice – at the margins of his family in the traditional sense (his parents and other "family" members):

Olivier (Paris, 39)

FJ : Who would be the other important people in your life ?

O: Well, yes, obviously, [my boyfriend] would be the most important person in my life. And the other would be my friends, and the members of my family. The members of my family and my family, yes. A bit of a blended family ("famille recomposée") as well, as so often. As a homosexual, yes, I have often felt uneasy with my own family. I love them, but there is often a lack of communication, or a problem of – I have the impression that I don't belong to [their] world. And so in a way I have reconstituted a different family, a family of friends and of people in the same milieu who are part of my life, who know who I am. [...] But [...] as it is getting better and better with my family, [...] they are also part of my life. The family, you mean mainly parents? My real family, they remain somehow people who have lived something but not much of my life. I have the impression not to live in quite the same world [as they do].⁷⁰

⁶⁹ For Giddens, homosexual couples can be seen as the historical avant-garde of this: "Gay women and men have preceded most heterosexuals in developing relationships, in the sense that term has come to assume today when applied to personal life. For they have had to 'get along' without traditionally established frameworks of marriage, in conditions of relative equality between partners." Giddens, *The Transformation*: 15. A position on the need for homosexuals to be a motor for the invention of new forms of intimacy is also often ascribed to Foucault – but not quite in a linear perspective of heralding individualism in society at large. On interpretations of Foucault concerning the invention of new forms of intimacy, see Eric Fassin. "Lieux d'invention: l'amitié, le mariage et la famille après Michel Foucault." *L'inversion de la question homosexuelle*. (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2005: 93-102). Fassin formulates a reading of Foucault as a political stance for democratisation of social norms rather than a herald of individualisation (p. 102)

⁷⁰ Original: "FJ: Quelles sont les autres personnes importantes dans ta vie?"

O: Ben oui, forcément, [mon ami] serait la personne la plus importante dans ma vie. Et les autres seraient mes amis et mes, des membres de ma famille. Les membres de ma famille et ma famille, oui. Une famille un petit peu recomposée aussi. Comme souvent. En tant que homosexuel j'ai, oui, - je me suis souvent senti en [difficulté] avec ma propre famille. - Je les aime beaucoup mais souvent on manque de dialogue, ou un problème de, - j'ai l'impression de ne pas appartenir au monde. Et donc j'ai un peu recomposé une autre famille, qui est une famille

Olivier illustrates the idea of such a self-knit conception of the family, where the reference to a family of choice ("I have reconstituted a different family [...] of friends") is indicated as a consequence of the feeling of marginality towards his own family. But at the same time, his construction of such a model of close friends which he frames in terms of family is equally one that is validated through that milieu itself. The validation of the "family of choice" thus comes from the milieu in which Olivier finds himself and where values such a construction of intimacy around friendships are seen as a norm within the group.⁷¹

This view on how gay and lesbian identities can be constructed thus presents one way of looking at the validation of gay and lesbian life plans as far as the family and intimacy are concerned. Often, however, role figures appear in a way that does not bear similarity to the view of social exclusion and a creative knitting of social relations from that position. As a counter example to the family of choice model, thus. Kevin, tells about how he would like his partnership to be similar to his parents' loving relationship, pointing at a clear parental role model:

Kevin (London, 32)

It's just a point of incidents. My parents have been married now for – thirty-seven years. And, I don't think during the whole time, - I mean they probably have, I mean they just cover it very well in the whole time, that they've been together, or the whole time I've been in their presence, I've never seen them argue about anything. They work together very well as a team, which is just really like, beautiful to watch. But, you know, just little things, you know. They both work, but they both come home at lunch time to see each other at lunch time, and they still hold hands, and still kiss quite openly – in public and at home and they're just very, very comfortable with each other, and it's you know, almost like you watching them the very first time. And that's like the couple relationship I would like to have with my partner. And I'm sort of quite envious of that. And it's not from the heterosexual point of view; I'm just envious of that, you know, the whole nuclear relationship they have. And also just the way in which they brought me up. You know. The morals and the high standards of what they had and they would expect, and I was saying they were strict, but, you know, they, I felt very comfortable leaving home at eighteen, and you know, I wouldn't say I was amazingly confident, but I wasn't scared to leave home.

Kevin thus tells of having tailored his vision of a successful relationship on his parents' happy marriage. Of course, such an admiration of parental relationships is not unanimous. Also, Kevin, as we have seen, subscribes to the idea of self-knit partnership models in other respects, such as concerning the negotiation of "open relationships", as we have seen in chapter 4.

d'amis et de gens du même milieu, qui font partie de ma vie. Qui savent qui je suis [...]. Mais [...], comme ça va de mieux en mieux avec ma famille, [...] ils font partie de ma vie aussi, donc, - . La famille, tu parles de parents surtout ? Ma vraie famille, - ça reste un peu des gens qui ont vécu mais pas grand-chose de ma vie. J'ai l'impression de pas être dans le même-, exactement dans le même monde."

However, generalisations of the creative character of gay and lesbian relationships should be taken with some care, and other references that validate the possibility of projects and lifestyles that gays and lesbians aspire to should be considered at least on an equal footing. In reviewing the link between gay and lesbian identities and the transcendence of social structures, it seems that the introduction of legal options for registering partnerships, and the inclusion into legal institutional structures, to a certain extent at least, undermines the idea of innovation and transgression in formulating self-made conceptions of family and friendship ties. And this does not remain without consequences for the discourse on constructing choices. While the potential of validation through a gay and lesbian reference to alternative models of partnership and close social networks is one important normative framework, others compete with it. Marriage, it could be argued, less and less features as being viewed as a norm that is identified as a reference that is about heterosexual couples, and the role of validation of other models of partnership as a consequence decreases.

Often, discourses in the evaluation of social environments are ambiguous or contradictory, with elements pointing in different directions. Mickael's narrative had at times given the impression of "society" partly being with him, and un-accepting persons as out of touch. But at other times, he clearly asserted that living a public gay life means messing with society ("on l'emmerde"). In returning to the idea of validation, the legal aspect comes back in where it is seen as an element closely related to public presence, such as media coverage of homosexuality, homosexual public figures or gay pride demonstrations.

This dialectic engagement with social norm seems to be what many respondents' identities are about. Their narratives reflect that identities are not constructed *against* the norms they find in society, but according to the available spaces. Life plans and choices in the public affirmation of identities, lifestyle and projects most often reflect what choices are regarded as valid in their social environment. But at the same time, critical distance is given an important weight – where the individuals interviewed here underline their difference to society overall, to a close social environment, or to other lesbians and gays.

⁷¹ See e.g. Weston (1991), *Families we choose*

6.5.3. Validation and the role of the law

We can thus reconsider the role of legal changes, such as the recognition of same-sex partnership, in such a perspective of validation. Is the legal sphere relevant as a category for the experience of validation, and does it take a specific role in the dialectic critical engagement of the individual in positioning herself in a framework of competing images of homosexual life projects?

As has been discussed above, the clear distinction between the law on the one hand, and society on the other, can be put in doubt. Honneth's Hegelian theory provided the law as one core element to the experience of recognition, besides love and social acceptance. From the point of view of the individual, this special position is not felt in quite the same way, at least in the material gathered here. As we have seen in the discourses, legal recognition, such as the recognition of same-sex partnership, does not stand out and is indeed often presented in narratives that flow into observations about media presentation and the like. Of course, it could be argued that these discourses do not reflect the true meaning of what the law means to people – an interpretation particularly understandable from the point of legal theorists. But even if we accept the narratives as they stand, the law can still be given a specific role. Different from impression of, e.g. media representation, legal options present a continuity and assurance of legitimacy that differs from social acceptance. The tentative interpretation of the idea of validation in the discourses on parental projects seemed to underline such a role, as we will see in section 6.6.. While they may be experienced similarly, recognition of social norms through either the close social environment or on a symbolic level by society at large are more subjective, and can shift within a narrative, as in Mickael's description of a society he is opposed to, while at the same time accusing some unaccepting people to be out of tune with society. The perception of legal recognition yet again may be unreliable, where respondents are often unaware of precise legal dispositions, or unstable, where the worth of legal recognition may be accepted in an interview situation when more than one person is involved and one respondent takes the lead. However, its objective existence (when legally existing) provides a referential fixity.

One example of such a shift in understanding of choices through legal change can be given on a very different topic, albeit similarly related to what is seen as a trend towards more liberal societies: One study that can be looked at in this context is a sociological study of a different

legal change in the French contexts, which draws on the link to changing social norms and the question of individual choice: Luc Boltanski has undertaken such a study on the case of the legalization of abortion in 1975 France.⁷²

Abortion, while not obviously similar to homosexuality, is an interesting case to consider here because of the taboo situation that was linked to it as a practice before its legalisation in 1975 (in France). In reviewing the link between law and morals, as largely debated in the case of abortion, Boltanski draws on Walzer and particularly Ricoeur, to argue against a view where law would be placed outside and independent of morality and social norms.⁷³ Ricoeur, Boltanski argues, best accounts for the case under study in viewing "in the law a mediation between the field morality and the field of politics"⁷⁴

The context of the law is a broad understanding of social change, where, as has often been invoked in the case of abortion, the law can react to social norms and correct discrepancies between social practice and legal norms. At the same time, the legal change necessarily implies a social change. In the case of abortion, it is understood in very different terms once it is legalized. The action acquires a completely different meaning, while conflicting interpretations persist in the individual's social context. The "abortion story" thus becomes a fundamentally different one through the changed legal context in which it is situated.

Can something similar be said concerning homosexuality? Surely, the change from legal repression of homosexuality to non-prosecution can be read in a similar way.⁷⁵ While in a very different context, the recognition of same-sex couples places itself in a similar socio-legal context of normative change. Indeed, in Western Europe, as to social and legal changes that are seen in the trend to liberalisation and modernization, abortion rights have formed a similarly present debate in the four countries that are part of this study as has, more recently, the question of same-sex couples.

In analysing the specific question of how the law can influence project narratives in the current context, it is useful, in the following, to look at the specific case of parenting projects and their

⁷² Luc Boltanski. *La condition foetale*. (Paris: Gallimard, 2004)

⁷³ Ibid: 216 and 100-107

⁷⁴ Ibid : 216, footnote 2. (Original : "dans le droit une médiation entre le champs de la morale et celui de la politique")

⁷⁵ For the German case, the consecutive decriminalisation of homosexuality and its direct impact on gay everyday life is accounted for e.g. in Stümke (1989), *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*.

relation to the legal framework. Arguably, here, the reference to validation is stronger than in partnership projects: in the respondents' discourses, the position of the child in the light of broader societal acceptance of homosexual parenting is a central element and thus renders validation in concrete social environments, but also at the level of the State particularly important. Through this, the analysis will also bring us back to the question of the national differences and the specific role the country has in determining discourses and individual perspectives about life styles and life projects.

6.6. Parenting projects and validation

Concerning family projects, the legal recognition of same-sex parenthood appears to transform the very essence of the desire to have children: from "egoism" (and transgression to the detriment of the child's interest), it transforms into a socially valued life project associated with altruism and community values.

It will be argued here that two ways to describe individual's projection into a life plan are 1) in terms of the availability of new images and 2) the symbolic validation of specific life plans. These two elements will allow for a readdressing of the question of choice of public identity and life plan in the light of the social factors that the available imagery and the validation by the social environment represent. This view takes a reflexivity into account that sees the individual in a twofold exercise, 1) responsible in modeling and deciding on life plan choices and 2) as responsive to images and options that are validated through the direct social environment, perceived society at large and legal option and the state.

6.6.1. Family projects: an egoistic life plan or helping others?

The question of whether lesbians and gays consider the option of parenting for themselves is twofold: on the one hand, they may or may not think same-sex couples should be allowed to raise children; on the other hand, they may or may not be interested in pursuing such a life project for themselves. It provides an interesting example for the negotiation of identities and life projects that has been laid out above: ideology and constraints are referred to in the discourses encountered on the question of gays and lesbians having children. In the following, two examples of discourses about parenting projects provide for an interpretation of how the notion of validation can be applied to this context. And in particular, we will ask: What role

can the law play in the validation of such projects through legitimizing parenting by homosexual parents?

The question of parenting and gay and lesbian parenthood has not been central to the project on the whole, neither has it been a central element in the interviews. It has however been raised, and, as we have seen, parenting had been an important element in the biographical narratives particularly for those respondents who in fact were lesbian or bisexual mothers (and a step-father in Jason's case). Much more could be said about gay and lesbian parenting.⁷⁶ Here, however, on the basis of a limited number of interview extracts, it will serve as an example for the notion of validation and for the consequences of legal change in this respect.

Ideology and constraints are referred to in the discourses encountered on the question of gays and lesbians having children. Thus, the construction of parenting projects bears parallels to the construction of public identities we have examined in chapter 5. But somehow, because the fact that with a child, a separate person needs to be included into this negotiation, for many, the evaluation of constraints becomes even more important: what difficulties will the child have with the situation it is brought into? Will it suffer from discrimination, from homophobia? Furthermore, on the side of ideology, as we be indicated below, the validation of the ideas about parenting by either the social environment, specialist discourse or other authorities such as the state and the law, becomes more important here than for e.g. partnership projects or public identities.

The argument presented here generalizes a complex issue and is bound to remain superficial in many respects; in particular we will not clearly differentiate between different ways in which parenting can take place, i.e. adoption, artificial insemination, first marriage children and so on.

Generally, many gays and lesbians embrace the idea of having children, and especially the very young respondents (under 25) often find it natural to think of parenting projects for their future. Also, even though we do not have a representative sample here, it is striking to see that on the whole, out of the four cities, respondents in London see much less problems in gay parenting than in the other three cities. Out of the four countries under study here, the UK is also the only country where adopting as a same-sex couple is legally possible.

⁷⁶ For a good qualitative study on lesbian mothers in the US context, see e.g. Lewin (1993), *Lesbian mothers*

Owen, who was interviewed in London, when asked whether he could think of having children, gives a clear affirmative answer, indicating that even as a single man, but preferably with a partner, he would consider it, underlining this perspective by referring to a gay friend of his who is going through an adoption procedure:

Owen (London, 26)

Definitely. Yeah. I mean even as a single gay man, I would, when I, if I get myself established I would like to. I'd like to try and adopt kids, yeah. It would be nice to raise a family, and with populations going through the roof, and if there are kids that need a home and, it would be nice to be able to raise some kids, yeah. So even, I mean, even as a single person, when I get myself together, I would probably look into adopting. And, I have a friend, from the same town as me in Ireland who's quite far through the process of adoption at the minute, and he's single. And yeah I would definitely like to have a look at that. Especially if I was in a relationship that was sound.

The mentioning of the friend who is evaluating adoption with the authorities seems to highlight the importance both of the validation of the social environment that parenting is a feasible option, "even" as a single, and that authorities approve of gays raising children and thereby performing a social function for "kids that need a home".

What is interesting in the question of gays' and lesbians' attitude towards parenthood is the diversity of views and contradicting discourses throughout the fieldwork. For many, in contrast to Owen's view, the question is a problematic one. Carlo for example, referring to a traditional family model, clearly objects to same-sex parenthood, because a child, according to him, needs a mother and a father who can provide different, complementary, forms of love. This discourse is one shared by certain psychological argumentations (often found in psychoanalytical traditions) and in Christian traditionalist argumentations. But he equally adds that, on top of this, it is the lifestyle of gays in particular that is not appropriate for parenting duties. According to him, gay life as such is characterised by superficiality and occasional lovers.

Carlo (Rome, 34)

C: I don't see it as an objective for me. And, well, I actually don't think it's right. I think that a child needs two figures that are not two men and not two women either. No, it's a man and a woman. Good or bad as they may be. Because then people tell me the usual things: "Yes, but two parents who are killing each other at home, are fighting all the time, better give the kids to two gays who nevertheless -". But no. Absolutely not. [...] Because a woman and a man are able to give a different kind of love to a child. It's a love that forms the child. Then, later, the child can still choose what path to take. But it should find itself in front of a stereotype, be it two women or two men or whatever, a stereotype that could make it getting off the track. Said by me [laughs] of course, because I'm gay, it's obviously strange. But I think that's how it is. [...] Because after all, we know very how we gays live. We don't have to get into that. So, a child, a kid who grows up in that type of situation, in that type of family context, I'd see it as getting off the track, it's not good for the growing up of the child. [...]

FJ: You said we know very well how we live. What do you mean by that?

C: How we live?

FJ: Yes.

C: Well, look, we live, - when it's not a longer story, or even if you have a longer relationship, we live of occasional encounters. Of situations that keep on coming up. And that no-one comes to tell me the opposite. And no-one should come and tell me: "No, because at home I have the child, I would never bring an occasional lover back home." No. No one is there to look. I absolutely don't believe in this, because unfortunately it's superficiality that rules. And therefore I'm absolutely not in favor of adoption.

As we have seen, Carlo referred to a psychological necessity, where the gender roles of mother and father are a constituent of the child's psychological integrity. He thereby draws on a discourse present in psychological and anthropological debates on the foundations of the family. Eric Fassin has analysed the impact of both psychoanalytical, anthropological and sociological positions in the debate on same-sex parenting in France.⁷⁷ He analyses the role of the sociologist Irène Théry in the debate on the Pacts in 1998, who has argued that "in the most universal sense of the word, irrespective of cultural differences, parenthood is the institution which articulates the distinction between the sexes as well as the distinction between generations."⁷⁸ Fassin denounces the political claim that social scientists such as Théry have attached to their positions, where the political is misunderstood if dictated by scientific claims to universal truths. While Anne's position is linked to the concept of "a mother and a father", it is very moderate in two ways: First, she sees compatibility between such a view and raising a child as a lesbian couple, provided a father is taken into the bigger picture. Second, she describes it as her personal view, linked to personal experiences rather than to a general scientific truth. Carlo, in contrast, is very virulent, explicitly pointing at the damage same-sex parents would cause to the child: "So, a child, a kid who grows up in that type of situation, in that type of family context, I'd see it as getting off the track, it's not good for the growing up of the child." Psychological necessity of gender differentiation and lifestyle arguments are intermingled in his position – and while his position is at one extreme of the spectrum of discourses, elements of the discursive arguments are present in a range of interviews.

"If I had to think egoistically..."

For many, however, it is the constraints in a prejudiced social environment the child will have to face, that objections to parenting are found. Why confront a child with discrimination in

⁷⁷ Eric Fassin. "Usages de la science et science des usages : à propos des familles homoparentales" Fassin (2005), *L'inversion*: 137-159

⁷⁸ Irène Théry as quoted *ibid*: 140. Original: "au sens le plus universel du terme, au-delà des différences selon les cultures, la parenté est l'institution qui articule la différence des sexes et la différence des générations."

society by having it grow up with homosexual parents? Claudia, in Rome as well, argues that this would be the difficulty for her in deciding to raise a child. Choosing to do so anyway, for her would be a somewhat “egoistic” way of thinking:

Claudia (Rome, 27)

FJ: When you say, about the question of having children, - is it an important topic for you, a thing you think about, the possibility to have children?

C: Yes, in fact I do think about it. For me personally it's important. But then of course, the idea to have children in subterfuge, with gay friends, like that, makes me worry, because, and then above all for the child. Every now and then I think, how can will it live the fact to have parents that are nevertheless different from parents they normally see around themselves? How could my kid be accepted by the other children? And that makes me worry. In fact I'm a bit – what I mean, if I should think egoistically about what I want, I would want one, full stop. That means, within a partnership, with economic security. But then, I hesitate when I think about how the child would live it. Makes me be in a bit of a crisis really.

While the constraints of parenting can be felt as an estimated discrimination, such as in Claudia's case the imagined schoolmates of a hypothetical future child, in other cases they can be the result of concrete experiences and the confrontation of ideas in the close social environment. The look of others onto the parenting situation has a special weight in the decision of whether to embrace the idea to have children as part of a gay or lesbian life project. While, as for the construction of public identities outlined above, we can differentiate between ideology and constraints in the formation of an attitude towards homosexual parenting, a special weight seems to be given to the validation of discourses by others. As Claudia's fear to adopt an “egoistic” viewpoint indicates, in planning to have children, it is often preferred to refer to someone else who says that it is a good thing. This can be the legislator, as many of the discourses in London may indicate, or simply a friends' point of view. But the law may play a special role here. Some would argue that people use law for understanding themselves and reality.⁷⁹ This view may be overstating the role of law – for example because in reality, most individuals would not be aware of the precise legal context they find themselves in. But it forms a means of understanding certain relations and forms a stable reference individuals can draw upon. And: While social validation may seem unstable and is open to uncertainties, interpretation and imagination, the legal context is identifiable and (relatively) stable. Thus, the law can transform “egoistic” parenting desires (Claudia) into a socially recognized valuable project (Owen).

In sum, parenting projects have become a realistic life plan for many gays and lesbians encountered in the fieldwork in Paris, London, Berlin and Rome. In particular the legal

backing of same-sex parenting (in the UK) seems to help an ideological affirmation of the idea of raising children as a gay or lesbian couple. In the negotiations of the life projects concerning parenting, we can observe similar negotiations as for the construction of public gay and lesbian identities. However, it seems that here, the validation of ideological discourses on parenting by the social environment takes an additional importance. It is often considered that the child could face discrimination. In the case of parenting, probably, legal legitimacy can have an enormous trigger effect on projecting oneself into a parenting project and altering doubts as well on the ideological as on the constraints side.

6.6.2. Parenting, validation, and the direct social environment

While the constraints of parenting can be felt as an estimated discrimination, such as in Marianna's case the imagined schoolmates of a hypothetical future child, in other cases they can be the result of concrete comments and the confrontation of ideas in the close social environment. Harriet, for example, who was interviewed in London, points out that while she very seriously considers the option of having children, this would not quite get her mother's blessing:

Harriet (London, 35)

H: The only thing that I could possibly point out is, - that my mother would be deeply unimpressed if I had children in a lesbian relationship. And I sense that already, because she's, she's basically told me she's happy with her one nephew and her one niece, and she doesn't want any more. So I've interpreted that as a hint that she wouldn't be very impressed if I had a child.

FJ: And why do you think that is?

H: Ehm, - I, well, just because she, she's a - extremely tolerant, and she's always been quite, - I think she's dealt with my been gay very very well. Considering how old-fashioned she is, in many respects.

FJ: Did you say, she's very tolerant, ...

H: She is very tolerant. Positive. Ehm, - . But I just imagine that - one thing that she hasn't been able to modernize (?) is the perhaps the feeling that children are better off with one male and one female parent.

FJ: Mm.

H: So I think probably, as much as she loves me, she would probably be a bit concerned if I had a kid.

Harriet refers to her mother's opinion as being clearly against lesbian parenthood on normative grounds. Interestingly, her girlfriend, who was also interviewed, separately, gave a similar answer on her mother's attitude towards lesbian parenthood, i.e. we are looking at the two hypothetical grandmothers' points of view:

⁷⁹ E.g. Joseph Raz, "Authority, Law, and Morality." *Ethics in the Public Domain*. (Oxford: Oxford University

Julia (London, 36)

No. [laughs] No, my mother doesn't think it's a good thing. [...] she said she would never accepted [accept] a child of mine that wasn't, ehm, created as part of a heterosexual relationship. But that was a long time ago, I hadn't actually brought the subject up since. That was about ten years ago at least. But she just, - anyway (??) I know that, [if] a child came along she'd be - as keen as anybody, any other grandmother. You know. So, that's just words. I know she wouldn't really mean it.

In Julia's case, the normative opposition is contrasted with her mum's loving nature that would accept the event of a child if it "came along", supported also by the time elapsed since her pronounced opposition "long time ago". The normative affirmations' by her mother are equally referred to as purely rhetorical: "that's just words". This assertion is significant in that the normative baggage of words, for Natalie, transcends her mother without really meaning it literally. While her mother would be "as keen as ... any other grandmother", the "words" to "never accept [Julia's] child", it seems would, at least to a certain extent, refer to some unreflected common sense, or general societal, statement about lesbian parenthood.

The look of others onto the parenting situation has a special weight in the decision of whether to embrace the idea to have children as part of a gay or lesbian life project. While, as for the construction of public identities outlined above, we can differentiate between ideology and constraints in the formation of an attitude towards homosexual parenting, a special weight seems to be given to the validation of discourses by others. As Claudia's fear to adopt an "egoistic" viewpoint indicates, in planning to have children, it is often preferred to refer to someone else who says that it is a good thing. This can be the legislator, as many of the discourses in London may indicate, or simply a friends' point of view. The interview with Jenny and Katharina illustrates a conversation between doubts about discrimination and the (very fast) validation of a discourse in favour of same-sex parenting. Here, Jenny is interactively confronted with Katharina's persuasive equality discourse (compare 4.1):

Jenny (Berlin, 20) and Katharina (Berlin, 22)

J: Concerning adopting children I'm always a bit sceptical, because I just think, you know, the children will have a hard time, also at school: "So you have two mums?" Or: "You have two dads?" Or, whatever. I find it hard for children. I don't know what to think about it. Of course they are, surely they are good to the kids and, I don't know, but I think the children have difficulties with that even nowadays, if they have two mums or something like that. That's what I think at least.

K: [If I had to write adoption and marriage laws], I would make it exactly the same as for heterosexual marriage. Exactly the same, the same rights and duties. Yes, and the same for adoption laws. Well, I think, yes, it might still be unusual for a child to have two mums or two dads, but I think that twenty or thirty years ago it was the same for a single mother who lived in

separation from her husband. That was also a thing that was still unacceptable some time ago, not long ago. And that's also seen as being completely normal today. And I think, yes, we have to get to the point that this becomes possible. I think that today we don't have an adoption right in Germany, do we? Yes, well I think it would be a great thing. I mean after all, there are enough children who have no parents, who grow up in an orphanage or wherever. And I think they should be able to get a good home, independently of what form that takes.

J: Well, if you hear her talk like that you can actually just agree with it. [laughs] Sounds good, yes.

In this passage, Jenny appears as a sceptic who sees the option of raising children as primarily defined by the social environment. Here, she describes herself as "sceptical" and thinks of the difficulties the child could face: "the children will have a hard time". While she is not describing the difficulties a lesbian mother could face, the worry of how much the child could feel accepted in the social environment it was raised in put a major constraint on Jenny's view of gay and lesbian family projects.

Katharina, in contrast, presents arguments where she seems to put herself into the position of the prime mover in deciding on family plans. Potentially hostile social environments are dismissed as stuck in the past when she refers to past discrimination against single mothers: For Katharina, the increasing acceptance of non-traditional heterosexual parenting will, in future, extend to homosexual parents (in line with a progress discourse, see chapter 4.2). In a similar way, Katharina could describe this view as one where it is up to lesbian and gay parents to educate their social environments, and not to be intimidated or restricted in how they construct their life plans. However, in the next sentence, she seems to indicate that the possibility is one that exists now ("we have come to the point..."), and using the capacity to go down the line with choosing life projects such as raising a child is a matter of society having significantly opened up. In other terms, it is a choice that is possible only due to certain historical factors: "And I think, yes, we have to get to the point that this becomes possible."

6.6.3. *Objections and resignations*

In these two attitudes to determine life projects such as raising a child, the role of the individual is a different one: either individuals and their options are determined by society and social norms, or the individual can decide on her life and confront society with her choices, conflictual as they may be.

For some, then, it is precisely the idea to put the individual (or the same-sex couple) forward as actively *deciding* on parental plans that is disturbing. Somehow, the fact that children do not

spring naturally out of a same-sex relationship can give the impression of a particular eagerness on fulfilling their personal project. Jacques, a 55 year-old teacher in a suburb west of Paris, who calls his overall view on society “conservative”, argues against adoption rights for same-sex couples while acknowledging that couples may have children if these happen to be there because of an earlier opposite-sex marriage:

Jacques (Paris, 55)

As to the children, [...] it seems to me to be something [...] that responds only poorly to an actual [demand]. [...] That two men should want to have one or several children at all cost. – Adoption rights for homosexuals, I am not particularly in favour of that.⁸⁰

One interesting element of this view is that the active involvement of the individual in *constructing* her life, including the alleged manufacturing (as opposed to things that just happen, naturally) of parenthood is seen as disturbing. Jacques calls this desire to be parents one that is “à tout prix” – at all cost. The cost could here be interpreted in two ways: 1) the cost of putting potential children in a discriminatory situation, 2) the cost of upsetting family norms and mainstream society for a personal life project. Both seem to be implied in Jacques's narrative, where he later asserts:

Jacques (Paris, 55)

The traditional family is one of the fundamental social facts. How should I say? Well, you can't eat at all tables, or, I don't know, run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, have a finger in every pie, you can't have the cake and eat it. So, wanting to do 'as if', to me does not seem to be a necessary thing.⁸¹

While Jacques values the traditional family, the choice of homosexuality for him excludes it as an option. In various metaphorical expressions, the incompatibility of the two worlds is underlined: The idea to “having the cake and eat it”, in the three different French expression Jacques uses here, invokes the idea of an individual choosing which lifestyle he wants to embrace: where to eat or where to play. The first metaphor suggests hypocrisy: you belong to one of the two groups. The second refers to opportunistic behaviour: you multiply your opportunities in an illegitimate way. The third metaphor (literally: “you cannot have the butter and the money of the butter”/ “on peut pas avoir le beurre et l'argent du beurre”) finally portrays both lifestyles as having positive elements to it, but that the desire to have both would constitute a greedy attitude, and a conceptual impossibility. In this line of thought, it could be

⁸⁰ Original: “Quant aux enfants, bon, [...] à mon avis, [...] ça ne répond que pauvrement à une réelle [demande] - que deux hommes, veuillent à tout prix avoir, un ou plusieurs enfants. [...] Le droit d'adoption, je pense, pour les homosexuels, je suis pas particulièrement, eh, pas particulièrement favorable.”

imagined that the choice is between a heterosexual traditional family life, and a homosexual life at the margins, which brings enjoyable freedoms of a different kind. The individual can choose, but choose between a certain set of available options (the “playing tables”, “tableaux”, that are available). While the role of the individual here seems an active, choosing one, in a later passage, Jacques says that one has to accept oneself as one is:

Jacques (Paris, 55)

I would have liked to have children, a solid family and all of that. But, well, I think that you have to accept yourself as you are and that's all. I wasn't going to marry and take on a family in order to please my parents and my neighbours. And I think that [...] two men who are living together, from the start they know that they won't have children. Unless [...] one of them was married and had children, and afterwards takes charge of the children. Well, there it's different. But otherwise, err, to adopt children as a gay couple does not seem to be an essential question to me.⁸²

Here, the idea seems to be that while there is a choice, the individual can either get the choice right, in living up to his own true self (“tel qu'on est”), or copy social norms to please one's environment, but thereby, it seems, one would get the choice wrong. Hence, the individual can neither choose her identity (“tel qu'on est”) nor define how a life according to that identity is going to be lived.

Some of course do not think about raising children as either “argent” or “beurre”, to take up on Jacques' expression. Simone in Berlin says that it simply had never been a desire or a question for her personally:

Simone (Berlin, 43)

FJ: What about children? Is the idea of having children important to you?

S: No. – Well, I have never had a desire to have children. And so, pfff, yes, I can't really make anything of that to start with I have to say. Err, there are – I don't know, well, if people have children and get along with them or are happy with that, then I always find that a quite a nice thing [to see]. But for myself that hasn't ever been the question so far.⁸³

⁸¹ Original: “La famille, traditionnelle est une des données fondamentales de la société, hein. Bon, il faut, comment dire, pas manger à tous les râteliers ou, je ne sais pas, jouer sur tous les tableaux, on ne peut pas avoir le beurre et l'argent du beurre. Donc, vouloir faire comme si, moi, me paraît pas, quelque chose de nécessaire.”

⁸² Original: “J'aurais aimé avoir des enfants, une famille solide et tout ça. Bon, mais, bon ben je crois que, bon il faut s'accepter tel qu'on est et puis c'est tout. J'allais pas me marier et prendre une famille pour faire plaisir à mes parents, à mes voisins. Et je pense que [...] deux hommes qui vivent ensemble, dès le départ ils savent qu'ils n'auront pas d'enfants. A moins que, [...] quelqu'un qui était marié, qui avait des enfants, puis ensuite, bon ben, il les accueille. Bon, là c'est différent. Mais, autrement, eh, adopter des enfants en couple gay, ça me paraît pas un problème essentiel.”

⁸³ Original: “FJ: Wie ist das mit Kindern. Ist die Vorstellung Kinder zu haben wichtig für dich? – S: Nee. – Also, ähm, ich hatte noch nie n Kinderwunsch. Und von daher, pff, ja, - kann ich damit jetzt erstmal nicht so viel anfangen, - muss ich sagen. – Ähm, - ja, also, gibt, ich weiß auch nicht, also, wenn Menschen Kinder haben und mit denen gut – klarkommen oder also dabei glücklich sind, dann find ich das schon auch immer ganz schön. – Aber für mich selber wars bisher also nie ne Frage.”

Simone's rejection of the idea of raising children underlines that as for other life choices, parenting is in no way a universal aim of gays and lesbians – a fact that needs to be pointed out also in the light of a decreasing parenting desire for heterosexuals in many European countries, particularly in Germany and Italy, where at present, birth rates are among the lowest in the world.⁸⁴

Others see it as an option that has not been realized at the time when it could have been seriously considered:

Anne (London, 35)

A: I would have liked a friend, who really wanted to be dad, and get involved with the child's life. I think that then we would have considered having a child. But it's difficult. Even in that constellation, which was the only one we'd have really considered, it's still complicated. Because three people, maybe four, in the life of [a child], that's not easy.

FJ: And now, are you still thinking about it? Is it still a topic that you ...

A: We can still do it. I think we still have a couple of years, maybe. But I don't think so. No, I think we got more or less used to the idea that it's not going to happen.

Anne's considerations and the fact of having gotten "used to the idea" not to have children is linked to the logistic effort a homosexual parenting project implies, and in her case, the desire to realize motherhood only if a father figure were included into the project.

As we have seen, different logics are at work in the different discourses on same-sex parenthood. All discourses imply deep linkages to the understanding of the individual and social norms around the family. For many, the child acts as an impartial observer, questioning life options much more than on any other life choices, as the responsibility of a decision to raise a child is taken to require a high degree of certainty concerning both the feasibility and the legitimacy of such a choice. This double checking and assurance seeking can be illustrated with a passage from a politician's autobiography: In his autobiographical book *La vie, passionnément*,⁸⁵ the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, describes his personal careful weighing of the social acceptance that raising a child as a homosexual father would encounter.

At 40, [...] the desire to be a father to be a father that I had evoked 15 years earlier intensified when a woman whom I admire and love wanted that we conceived of this possibility together.

⁸⁴ In Western Europe, fertility levels are at about 1.6 for 1994-2004, compared to 2.6-3.0 in the 1960s and 1.7-1.9 in the 1980s. The mean age of mothers at first birth has consistently increased from around 25 years in the 1970s to over 29 years in Western and Northern Europe in 2004. Eurostat 2004-2005, see Tomás Sobotka, 'Lower and later fertility in Europe: Recent trends and future prospects', *ILC-UK and BSPS Conference on "The consequences of later and lower fertility"*, 26 April 2005, London, online version www.ilcuk.org.uk/downloads/1 Fertility in Germany (1.34) and Italy (1.29) are well under the level in France (1.89) and the UK (1.77). (*World Health Report 2005*, WHO 2005).

⁸⁵ Bertrand Delanoë. *La vie, passionnément*. (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 2004)

I started a procedure to be considered as an adoptive parent for two siblings. [...] In parallel to the long and numerous conversations with the psychologists and other persons responsible for the inquiry that was legitimately conducted by the administration, I more than ever consulted the opinions, comments, thoughts – be they critical – of the people who were close to me. [...] My homosexuality was the major handicap that I myself conceived of on the path towards this project. I principally turned to my friends who were women and mothers, so that they would evaluate the seriousness of such a perspective in the light of their own motherhood. [...] And what my friends went over with in the fastest, simplest way, without sharing my own worry, was my homosexuality. For all, without exception, that was not the question, even if they all understood that I myself put this question forward with such intensity.⁸⁶

What is interesting in the explanation that Bertrand Delanoë gives of this decision process is the elaborate and explicit nature of seeking council from experts, authorities, and friends. He describes himself, unlike them, as initially viewing his homosexuality as the major problem. Delanoë then explains that the adoption has not materialized because of the time consuming character of his commitment to political involvement. Of course, in a politician's biography (as in any text), we should not take for granted that the presentation of the narrative serves a specific purpose, namely to underline his sense of responsibility in considering the adoption of a child, devoting particular attention to other people's judgements to reaffirm his choice. However, this is precisely what is interesting: the question of legitimacy is outsourced to the direct social environment and the public (the readers of Delanoë's book) are likely to find this a sensible procedure and a responsible approach to the idea of homosexual parenthood. In this discourse, the individual is not free to choose; the social environment is to choose for the individual.

6.6.4. More difficult for gay men?

In talking about homosexual parenthood, gay and lesbian parents are often combined in research or political texts. On the practical side, both biological, cultural and legal factors make the realization of a plan of being a parent appear under quite different lights. Lesbian women, should they decide to have children often consider artificial insemination. Julia points

⁸⁶ Ibid: 69-70. Original: "A quarante ans, [...] j'ai approfondi ce désir d'être père évoqué quinze ans plus tôt, lorsqu'une femme que j'admire et que j'aime avait souhaité que nous le concevions ensemble. J'ai entamé la procédure d'agrément pour adopter une fratrie. [...] Parallèlement aux longs et nombreux échanges avec les psychologues et autres responsables de l'enquête, légitimement conduite par l'administration, j'ai plus que jamais sollicité l'avis, les commentaires, les réflexions, fussent-elles critiques, de mes proches. [...] Mon homosexualité était le handicap majeur que je dressais moi-même sur la voie de ce projet. Je me suis tourné principalement vers mes amies, femmes et mères, afin qu'elles évaluent à la lumière de leur propre maternité le sérieux d'une telle perspective. [...] Et ce que mes amis ont traité le plus vite, le plus simplement, sans partager mon angoisse, c'est mon homosexualité. Pour tous, sans exception, ce n'était pas la question, même si chacun comprenait que je me la pose avec autant d'intensité."

out that for a gay man, this is much more complex. She refers to her gay brother who would like children but, according to Natalie, loses out:

Julia (London, 36)

My brother's gay and would love to have children. [...] He's got a real problem cause he, - yeah, I mean, he's a teacher, and he loves kids, and, eh, - I don't think he knows anybody who, who would, eh, have a kid for him. It's so much harder. I mean a woman can have a baby, presumably, if she's healthy and she's able to have children. Pretty much any time she wants, until the age when she can't have children anymore. You got options. For guys, to try and find a woman who's willing to, a) have a child and b) let him have the kid. So he's, yeah, he's losing out there.

While there may be obvious practical difficulties, particularly for men but also for female couples, parenting projects have become a realistic life plan for many gays and lesbians encountered in the fieldwork in Paris, London, Berlin and Rome. In particular the legal backing of same-sex parenting (in the UK) seems to help an ideological affirmation of the idea of raising children as a gay or lesbian couple. In the negotiations of the life projects concerning parenting, we can observe similar negotiations as for the construction of public gay and lesbian identities. However, it seems that here, the validation of ideological discourses on parenting by the social environment takes an additional importance. It is often considered that the child could face discrimination. In the case of parenting, probably, legal legitimacy can have an enormous trigger effect on projecting oneself into a parenting project and altering doubts as well on the ideological as on the constraints side.

6.6.5. The case of parenting and the role of the national context

It can thus be said that the role of validation in constructing projects such as concerning the idea to take on the role of parenting proves to be fundamental in the narratives we have looked at. We have seen that in such a validation perspective, we can distinguish between the idea of validation through the law, through close social environments, and through a symbolic notion of social acceptance in mainstream society. In the latter, expert discourses play a role, sometimes for rejecting such an option, sometimes in order to justify it. The different spheres of validation are thus structured similarly to Honneth's spheres of recognition we have looked at in chapter 5, where the sphere of love can be described as that of direct social interaction with the close environment, the sphere of law representing the legal options in place, and the sphere of social acceptance finally as regrouping the more abstract sense of what social norms seem to be accepted in mainstream societal discourse and established common knowledge through expert discourses.

The validation through close social environments and through the law in particular has an important impact on the projection into parenting projects. It was argued that the idea to raise a child, for many lesbians and gays, puts a particular emphasis on the question of validation: Is it judged to be a personal desire, and puts the child's happiness at risk, such as through discrimination, or does it mean fulfilling a social function, i.e. nurturing a child seen as serving society by contributing to societal goals and needs?

Concerning parenting, as we have seen, legal validation plays a central role, which can serve to explain the absence of discourses in the UK that, from the part of lesbians and gays, would exclude the idea of homosexual parenting projects on normative grounds. On this account, we can reconsider the role the national context plays in the analysis of normative change. Concerning the three relevant spheres, the national context most obviously and most explicitly applies to the legal framework in which the individual finds herself. We have seen that concerning partnership perspectives, legal options in other countries had been taken into account by various respondents. In projecting parenting, however, such references did not exist.

The spheres of recognition, drawing on Honneth's analysis and the references for the validation of choices can be resumed as follows:

Spheres of recognition and references of validation:

<u><i>Love</i></u>	<i>Direct social interaction, partner, friends, parents</i>
<u><i>Law</i></u>	<i>Specific legal options and possibilities, references to legal possibilities elsewhere</i>
<u><i>Social Acceptance</i></u>	<i>Media images, abstract symbolic (perceived) norms, expert discourses</i>

We have seen that references can be extremely diverse. Also, on the level of social acceptance, which is evaluated on highly unstable, abstract terms, with sometimes contradictory discourses about the inclusion of homosexuality into mainstream norms, on the one hand, and about the presence of homophobic attitudes, on the other. Concrete social environments play a key role, in which a biographical, personal context constitutes the central background to the discourses of the respondents. Concerning the sphere of social acceptance, the symbolic reference to a

norm of higher acceptance, instead, proved to transcend national boundaries, where international media productions, European and American debates were referred to. The national context thus constitutes one factor among others concerning partnership projects and the construction of gay and lesbian identities concerning both their public and private nature and their actualization in specific lifestyles. The case of parenting project, instead, brings the national legal context to the foreground. In the US, the legal context concerning parenting is mostly constructed on the level of the single States, and on the local level – in Europe the national context provides both the actual possibility, in cases such as adoption, but also the referential norm as to what is perceived as a feasible project. It could thus constitute an interesting comparative study on parenting projects – a perspective that has not been taken here on any systematic grounds.

6.7. Conclusion

This chapter has recast a different light on the normative changes and the place of the individual within them. A next analytical step has been introduced, in which the discourses from the field that have been presented throughout chapters 3 to 5 have been taken into account, and additional theoretical frameworks have been applied. To this purpose, first, the role of images in the construction of identities has been reviewed as based on a reading of Jean-Claude Kaufmann's sociology of the individual. As we have seen, such an account of "images" provides a strong explanatory basis for the appropriation or rejection of norms that are perceived on a symbolic level, or, in other terms, quite explicitly through the form of media images. Within a changing normative environment, we have said, the individual can be understood as a process, choosing which images to take into the construction of identity and which to discard. However, the force of social change can equally present challenges to identity construction. In Kaufmann's terms, new images can "burst" into the individual's life and alter choices that as a consequence have lost their feasibility. Such a dynamic view of the individual has been exemplified through three examples of "challenges" to identity construction.

Thereafter, the norms of public and open homosexual identities, on the one hand, and the norm of committed partnership, on the other, have been reviewed as representing the elements of social change incarnated by the legal reforms towards the recognition of same-sex couples. Several examples have been given, and the growth of these norms in the Western European

context highlighted in this dissertation have been related to debates about the "normalization" of homosexuality in the US and European literature. As we have equally seen, such normative changes give rise to creative spaces for gay and lesbian lifestyles – but for some they create difficulties, for example where the requirement of openness conflicts with continuing discrimination or prejudice.

On aspect of such normative change can be observed on the level of generational change. More inclined to "dreaming of marriage", the partnership norm has been argued by many and is an increasing reference for the younger generation. But even more clearly, an "easier" construction of openly homosexual identities, and the affirmation of gay and lesbian lifestyles in public, is generally attributed to younger lesbians and gays. However, as we have seen, calling for such a shift to imply that the younger generations were to be regarded as "post-gay", in constructing their identities without the experience of marginality or discrimination would be a generalization that stands at odds with the overall findings of the study. Indeed, most often, a double reference is given to being "with" the norm – living in a society where homosexuality has become symbolically accepted – and living "outside" the norm – with a continuing need to be careful about potential discriminations and still experiencing elements of "being marginal". This has been exemplified with Cédric's narrative taken from a focus group interview.

Such ambivalence and the role of new "images" of homosexuality were equally shown to explain counter-trends to the social progress discourses of growing acceptance. The new images of homosexuality, as has been argued, has equally provided an "image" for strong opponents of what is often regarded as a liberalization of society and indeed, in some respects and in a range of societies worldwide, it is indeed accompanied by the growth of what has become framed as "homophobia".

The question of generational differences and social change were addressed in a different light for the example of parenting projects. Here, the notion of "validation" was introduced and exemplified with interview extracts. In the context of parenting projects, it has been argued, besides the validation through concrete social environment and a perceived normative change in society at large, the legal sphere acquires a particular meaning: from being seen as an "egoistic" life project, parenting is potentially transformed as being seen as an altruistic civic engagement. Through this example and on the basis of the previous analysis, thus, the notion

of validation has provided a tool to reassert the elements of recognition in the three spheres taken from Honneth's theory of recognition, in direct social environments (partner, family, friends), the law (legal frameworks in the countries that are being analyzed but also in references to laws elsewhere) and social acceptance (less tangible views on what has become recognized by society and accounts of the dominant images of homosexuality). The analysis has thus helped to cast a better insight into what it means, on the level of the individual, to experience a shift towards the recognition of same-sex couples in the European context, both in countries where an extensive form of Civil Partnership and parenting and adoption rights have been introduced (the UK), countries where more restricted forms of legal recognition of same-sex partnership have been introduced and parenting rights are restricted (France and Germany) and those where no legal recognition has been introduced but debates and references to developments abroad have been important (Italy).

Conclusions

Summary of three main theses

1) You should be open about it but you cannot tell everyone.

The transformations that have been analysed, on the legal and social level, are experienced by the individual as a new normative context to which reciprocity and coherence are central principles. Society has become more accepting of homosexual lifestyles and gay and lesbian identities; 'conflict' is not the founding feature of such identities anymore. But hostility is not absent even from the arguably highly accepting urban environments in Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome. In certain contexts, homophobia has even increased where the image of the homosexual has become a target of hostility. As a consequence, the individual finds her- or himself in an ambivalent position between the norms of coherence and openness, on the one hand, and the need for a careful management of differently constructed public identities in different social settings, on the other – unless the social settings themselves are carefully selected accordingly.

2) The law can have a more stable role in validating life projects than the broad range of other determinant factors of identity construction.

The material has shown how the impact of the legal changes on the individual is situated in a range of thematic angles: In the interview narratives, the linkages have been identified across biographical, cultural, societal, geographical and legal aspects concerning the recognition of homosexuality and same-sex couples. For the construction of identity, often, the legal reference constitutes one of the referential images available to the individual. It is, however, embraced, re-appropriated or rejected in different ways. Concerning partnership, it can thus be peripheral to the conceiving of concrete life projects and identities. But the law represents a more solid reference than the fluidity of the uncertain notion of social acceptance: In certain cases, the law, through its role of validation, can have a dramatic impact in how certain projects are embraced and life project narratives transformed. This was most strongly exemplified in the example of parenting projects.

- 3) The lesbian and gay bar culture in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome can be seen as a paradigm of a European social space.

The transformation of how homosexuality is viewed and lived in society, in legal and social terms, can be regarded as occurring in a European social space. As this study has shown, societal transformations and political debates are to a certain degree equivalent across European borders. Developments in neighbour countries have an important cross-national impact, provided that similar, internationalised and mobile milieus are looked at. The metropolitan lesbian and gay bar milieu constitutes an ideal case study for this specific – and limited - understanding of European society: it is characterized by high mobility, cross-national partner- and friendships. Within it, norms and developments in other countries provide readily available references for identity construction.

In this concluding section, the three main concluding theses are reformulated in more depth:

1. Theorizing the individual

The interview narratives from the fieldwork in the four cities constituted the centrepiece of this study. However, in framing the empirical results, more abstract theoretical inquiry has been essential. The study has provided an analysis of the individual as an agent within social and legal transformations with regards to personal plans and projects and public and private identities. Beyond this, the theoretical observations have themselves been sharpened through the illustrations that the review of the discourses and narratives represented.

The Goffmanian notion of "identity management" was fundamental in framing the analysis of lesbian and gay identity construction in different social settings. The various discourses on public identities throughout the interviews were examined in 5.1 and 5.2 principally through the examples of the relationship to parents and behaviour in work environments. Despite variations between the four cities and between e.g. different work environments, in most cases, as has been shown, rather than speaking of homogenously "out" homosexual identities, identity management reflects the strategic and normative construction of different public identities in different social settings – throughout the field.

Axel Honneth's theoretical perspective allowed us to go beyond the analysis of identity management: his understanding of recognition as a threefold experience in the spheres of love (or close social environments more broadly speaking), law, and a sense of broader social acceptance, provided a framework that accommodated for the interconnectedness that we had been looking at. Beyond the mere application of Honneth's framework of recognition, a critical reading stressed that Honneth's theory strongly relies on liberal normative foundations that take values of equality and reciprocity for granted for a functional recognition that would lead to the fulfilment of the individual. In other words, institutions (legal or social) need to be framed in coherent, reciprocal, egalitarian terms in order to establish a functional liberal understanding of recognition in law, society, and close social environments, including relationships. This reading thus reflects on the overarching normative transformations that gays and lesbians in European societies are undergoing and places them in a broad social theory of recognition.

This normative background thus accounts for a successive spread of these fundamental values through legal and social institutions on all levels. Indeed, their coherent application, as we have seen, was reflected in several elements of the empirical findings. First, these normative foundations were reflected in the equality discourse that respondents gave to support recognition claims for same-sex unions: We saw in chapter 4.1 how the equality principle constituted the main rationale that was underlying the overarching agreement among respondent that legal reform recognizing same-sex partnership was "a good thing". Also, in 4.2, a "progress discourse" was identified: the idea of progress can also be read as being related to the same rationale where a principle of equality is more and more applied to all aspects of society, leading to an increasing acceptance of homosexuality and gay and lesbian lifestyles – an observation that was equally dominant in all four cities. But also, the notion of reciprocity and coherence is a key feature of the tensions within criticisms of marriage that were reviewed in 4.3. The uncritical reproduction of role models and the unquestioned conforming to traditional social institutions, such as patriarchal marriage, are instead subject to severe challenges. Closely related to this, finally, the same logic can be read into the projecting of partnerships and intimacy: those forms of partnership and intimacy that in the long-run can be coherently linked to a reciprocal, egalitarian understanding of partnership, based on choice and reciprocal fulfilment, provide for discursive legitimacy. In 4.4, one important type of discourse saw the main legitimising factor of the very definition of partnership as a reciprocal egalitarian partnership, where the negotiation on equal terms of the

very terms of the partnership was a central feature. However, on this matter, as we had seen, a range of radically different partnership discourses were identified: the principle of negotiation was not a unanimous one – most respondents held un-negotiable principles as for them defining a partnership, and a range of "unclear" partnerships (mostly for male respondents) provided a generally pluralistic picture, such as through continued relationships defined as casual, purely sexual, or anecdotic.

Reciprocity, coherence, and openness

The idea that choices throughout different spheres of life and social settings should be "coherent" and "open" is connected to this framework of egalitarian normative requirements. Thus, the perspective we have given provides an overarching logic behind various broad trends and specific findings from the field: the recognition of same-sex couples, the more general (heterosexual) trend towards a contractual understanding of partnership, discourses about negotiating partnership (such as concerning non-monogamous relationships), the norm of "being out" in public, and the stigmatization of the "homophobic". While such a general trend is equally accounted for in a perspective of "democratization" and "individualization", the fuller view that has been developed here, in analogy, is that of "coherent reciprocalization". In difference to the democratization and individualization perspectives, it is less centred on linear progress and less centred on choice. It allows for constraining ambiguities: This perspective underlines the fact that rather than finding themselves in less constraining environments (although this can of course be true in a different sense and is mostly experienced as such), the social transformations that occur equally constitute new constraints and can challenge identity constructions that clash with them.

Normalization debates can be read in this perspective. The negative connotations of the inclusion of homosexual lifestyles into mainstream norms are due to the loss of the status of "incoherence on the margins", where the need to conform to wider social norms is suspended and within which more freedom is granted. At the margin anything goes – even though we have seen that lesbians and gays, dependent on the respective milieus and how much they belong to them, also find themselves in the specific normative contexts of these very milieus. This perspective on "normalization" needs not be a conservative one. Indeed, the principles related to the value of equality would not traditionally be interpreted in these terms. Instead,

revising institutions and social norms in the light of foundational norms will continue as a process of interpretation of what structures and (legal and social) institutions they require.

Ambivalence and challenges

The difference to a liberalizing interpretation of a democratization process in family and partnership norms lies in the view that the individual conforms in a different way: she or he conforms to the images and constraints that a transformed society produces. The analysis in chapter 6 drew on Kaufmann's sociology of the individual that described the individual as a process and as "bombarded" by images that in turn constitute her or him as a modern, choice-driven individual. Some key examples from the fieldwork but also from media presentation have underlined the challenges that certain norms, particularly "openness" and "coherence" can constitute for the individual.

Largely, these new images make things "easier": in a new normative context in which homosexuality is more accepted on a symbolic societal level, a non-conflictual construction of homosexual identities had imposed itself for a new generation ("the younger ones find it cool to be gay"). Younger homosexuals, as we have seen, are said to construct their identities much less around a conflict with societal norms. It could even be said that the very stigma that used to be a foundational feature of homosexual identity today seems to be more attached to homophobic attitudes. However, the view that the "insult" has disappeared from the experience of constructing gay and lesbian identities would be wishful thinking: Instead, the new normative context is inherently ambivalent: an open, accepted homosexuality is expected, on the one hand, but on the other hand, discrimination and hostility persists in sections of society – at least outside certain safe havens of acceptance.

The ambivalence that the norms of openness and coherence create is accentuated by their contrast to the specific rationale of a traditional feature of homosexual identity: effective identity management in different social spheres. Indeed, the need to construct private or secrete identities is still felt in various areas of gay and lesbian lives in Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome. Only in very few cases are identities lived as openly homosexual in every circumstance and even here, this openness is often subjected to geographical restrictions or has been connected to adapting biographies so as to encounter particularly accepting environments. The image of the "modern homosexual" has come into the spotlight and today constitutes a

target for hostility, and thus accounts for trends towards increased homophobia in parts of the world and specific environments - particularly in religious and marginalised environments, where they are mostly associated with anti-liberal sentiments. And in a degree of contradiction with such trends, forms of Double Lives, as they have been systematically addressed by Chauncey and as they could be encountered in the examples of challenges to identity in Nicole's, Katharina's and Jason's narratives have to a certain extent become unjustifiable and are seen as ambiguous and stigmatised in those circles that accept homosexuality.

2. The impact of the law

The second main conclusion concerns the role of the law. The thesis had looked at the legal change as a main element within a broader social change towards the acceptance of homosexuality. This interwoven picture was confirmed in the narratives that arose from the fieldwork. One of the main questions, thus, had been what role precisely the law could play in this broad interactive process. What role does it play within the transformations we have looked at?

The law as one reference among many

We had seen that in sometimes contradictory narratives, the respondents placed the law within a variety of arguments. The way in which the law influences discourses on homosexuality and identity, society and acceptance, is manifold. The research design that had included a wide range of thematic angles in the questionnaire guide successfully explored these different contexts. Legal change was related to biographical, cultural, societal, geographical and legal aspects that concerned the recognition of homosexuality and same-sex couples. As we have seen, often, the themes were touched upon by the respondents in the open narratives without the interviewer's intervention: how it affects social change, how it comes "late" after a long-term societal change, what role a partnership law could play in a personal partnership project, how the law should be shaped, or e.g. what consequences a partnership registration would have for them personally.

It has been seen that the law contributes to the set of referential images which "bombard" the individual and which have a constitutive impact on their identity. It was argued that the legal recognition of same-sex couples produces a strong image that implies conjugality, non-

discrimination/equality, and openness/coherence. But the role of images can produce unpredictable outcomes. Images can be embraced or set aside; they can even be reinvented with a new meaning. This had been exemplified concerning personal life projects, where the projection into partnership question was addressed through asking if respondent would envisage formalising a relationship on the legal level (4.3). Here, very different, sometimes diametrically opposed views were identified. We had thus seen how such a – sometimes hypothetical – option as an image of future projects was appropriated in very contrasting ways: dependent on the biographical context and ideological connotations, "marriage" (or a form of civil partnership) was embraced as a life plan, rejected on ideological grounds, or appropriated on pragmatic grounds through according a personalized meaning to it.

The law's impact on the "trend" towards acceptance

More unanimously, concerning the broad observations on social transformations, the legal changes often appeared as one element among many, on an equivalent level to public politicians or TV programmes, Hollywood films and soap operas as having shaped societal views. In this light, the effect of the legal changes concerning partnership – particularly in Berlin and Paris - was often related to the place of the respective highly publicized debates in the political arena of the two countries. Concerning Rome, no such legal change had occurred by 2007 within the Italian context, and in London, where the Civil Partnership was about to take effect in 2005, no comparable large-scale debate had taken place in the UK on this precise issue, but instead on the age of consent and the teaching of homosexuality at schools (section 28). However, in all four cities, a "trickle-down" effect was conceived of by several respondents: that the legal recognition would eventually reach parts of society that had been hostile to homosexual lifestyles. On the level of the discourses, while the legal changes were largely seen as being framed by an overarching "progress discourse" which the law was due to follow, there was mostly a circular notion of how the law in turn reinforced this progress trend. This constitutes a common impression concerning the transformative force of law: as impacting on social acceptance – an influence however that was thus seen as functioning both ways around.

The law as legitimising and validating factor

A second transformative force of the law in this respect is less circular when it concerns the legitimisation of identities and life projects. On the one hand, we had seen that for a range of respondents, a formal partnership institution as an option for themselves was viewed as peripheral to the conceiving of concrete life projects and identities. On the other hand, however, it appeared to provide a symbolic referential image that, inscribed in the law, proves to be more stable and reliable than the more subjective, imagined notions of social acceptance. This image is in turn nevertheless embraced, re-appropriated or rejected in different ways. But its specific role concerns the more solid reference it provides in contrast to the fluidity of the uncertain notion of social norms. This was discussed through the notion of the validation of life projects. In certain cases, the law, through its role of validation, can thus have a dramatic impact on how certain projects are embraced and life project narratives transformed. In the example of childcare, validation seemed to play a particularly important role, as the consequences of a life project have an impact on another person, i.e. the child. It was shown how, concerning lesbian motherhood and gay fatherhood, validation by others was central and essential to envisaging such a project. And the law (beyond the question of the practical feasibility of procuring children, e.g. through adoption or the access to medically assisted artificial insemination for women) offers a comparatively stable and reliable validation of parenthood projects that can thus be counted on. It limits the role of other – social – forms of validation. In the case of parenting projects, the law thereby has a fundamental transformative power: As has been shown, it can change discourses on childcare from being an "egoistic" life plan (to the detriment of the child) to an altruistic "contribution to society" (e.g. to help children who need support). But as we have seen, beyond the case of parenting projects, the law can thus have a more stable role in validating life projects than the broad range of other determinant factors of identity construction.

3. A European Social space: the metropolitan lesbian and gay milieu

The third main conclusion regards the research design of the empirical research: in an innovative way for a qualitative sociological approach, this project included four different national contexts in its fieldwork without being conceived as a *comparative* project as such. Instead, the metropolitan lesbian and gay scene of the four capitals was regarded as one field. Sociological research on homosexuality mostly contains qualitative elements, because of its

concern with a (still) hidden population, on the one hand, and because of the intimate character of questions surrounding sexuality and love, on the other. Quantitative studies in this domain can be regarded as methodologically complicated or unreliable. Many larger studies have (successfully) avoided a bias towards the study of a main or capital city, and taken account of homosexuality in smaller cities and on the countryside. Here, on the contrary, the four capital cities were selected in taking on board an explicit bias towards a specific kind of milieu. What characterizes these city milieus?

Equivalent cleavages

The study has shown that a variety of social backgrounds, age groups, respondents with different ideological views, different expectations concerning partnership and sexuality, and differently defined sexual orientations could be reached through a (stratified) random selection in the lesbian and gay bars of the four cities. Some characteristics have stood out, such as high mobility: migration within one country (most respondents were not born in the city where they were interviewed), migration across countries (often inner-European migration); a generally good knowledge of and large referential interconnectedness with other European countries (cross-referencing to legal and social situations in different national contexts) and personal interconnectedness (travel, in many cases partners from or in other countries, friendships abroad). The resulting narratives showed that within the different city contexts, equivalent *types* of discourses became apparent. These types of discourses mostly repeated themselves in each of the cities. Rather than distinguishing a discourse specific to Berlin, London, Paris or Rome respectively, it was more coherent to distinguish between feminist, conservative and pragmatic discourses, to distinguish strategies of secrecy, privacy and public openness, running across the geographical boundaries. In these respects, the four cities' lesbian and gay milieus that have been studied showed a considerable degree of homogeneity.

Country, culture, city, language

Of course, the context of each of the cities matters. The national context makes that the debates about homosexuality and historical developments take a certain path and frames discourses about the past and present influences, political connotations and the perception of society and social acceptance. The legal situation and political debates in each of the countries took different forms, despite some similar patterns concerning the arguments in the political

realm and the similar political cleavages at a certain stage of the countries' respective debates. Through the perspective that has been adopted here, all contextual distinctions in this respect could not satisfactorily be explored. However, the national context was not the only important contextual element that was partly bracketed in the analysis. Various other contextual elements were mentioned but not fully spelled out. Cultural and biographical elements could often not be analysed in any further depth, such as Christophe's Afro-Caribbean background or Katharina's Polish background. More generally, the city's spatial and cultural context was not systematically addressed – one example here is the case of Berlin with its unique history and fundamental structural shift since the fall of the Wall. At the same time, the restricted milieu study also reached beyond the context of the capitals' gay and lesbian bar milieus. Through the biographical contexts, various different social realities that go beyond the metropolitan lesbian and gay milieu could be addressed through individual narratives, such as regional differences in discourses of respondents who had migrated to the capitals, or, to name another example, different professional environments and the construction of identity within them.

Yet another factor that has not been fully analysed was the impact of language on qualitative analysis. To be sure, conducting qualitative sociological research in four languages bears a certain cost: a workload cost concerning translations, but also a cost concerning the feasibility of an in-depth linguistic analysis of narratives. To cite one example, a closer look at expressions for self-definitions, i.e. nuances between "gay", "lesbian", "gay woman", "dyke", "homosexual", "bisexual", "puff", "queer", "fag" and what these terms represent in the respective linguistic traditions, could not be fully addressed.

A European phenomenon in a cosmopolitan milieu

In framing the phenomenon that was the centre of analysis in this project, the socio-geographical definition of the field was overall successful. It helped to frame the transformation of social norms and the context of gay and lesbian identity construction in a social space that transcends national boundaries in significant ways. Indeed, as was shown, the specific way in which the question of the recognition of same-sex couples and the trend towards the acceptance of homosexual lifestyles has been expressed in the four countries can be regarded as a European one. A specific meaning of political, social and legal transformations was thus successfully analysed as a European phenomenon with an appropriately defined milieu that accounted for a notion of a European social space. Indeed,

framing the macro-transformations that were examined as a national phenomenon, which would result from factors internal to each country only, would appear to be flawed: the parallel developments in other countries cannot altogether be neglected.

The gay and lesbian metropolitan milieu can be seen as a paradigm for a highly internationalised environment, which is characterised by high mobility, communication and migration and a high degree of identification with similar milieus across the world. It can therefore easily be described as a cosmopolitan milieu within a European cultural context. This study has shown how in such a milieu, developments in other countries, such as the (hypothetical) possibility to “marry in Amsterdam”, provide readily available references for identity construction. The limitations of studying such a milieu, rather than another one that would not represent the same characteristics, need to be spelled out fully, and analogous studies should complement a more general picture. Through its research angle, this study casts a light on how certain milieus across national borders have an increasing coherence, while incoherence and cultural gaps may increase even within one neighbourhood in one of the cities, as some respondents had argued (e.g. Simone or Jérémy).

The national context within a European phenomenon

But the research design also allowed for making explicit in what respects the national contexts mattered more significantly than in others. One case that was singled out in many respects was the Italian context: In Rome, cultural elements, particularly Catholicism, were repeatedly referred to in the interviews and seen as particularly dominant compared to the other three cities' milieus. Also, in this case, the absence of legal developments at the time of the fieldwork made that the reinforced symbolic acceptance as a consequence of the law had not taken place: there was no trickle-down effect as there had arguably been, to some extent at least, in the other three countries. Such differences were clearly reflected in results such as concerning the typologies of whether respondents were “out” at work or towards their parents: in Rome, more than three quarters were not. This demonstrated clearly that both the national legal framework and the cultural national background still have a significant influence. Concerning the law, this was exemplified through the changing discourses on same-sex parenting. Regarding partnership laws, recognition on the legal level was seen as symbolically important, and cross-referencing to the norms in other countries was common throughout the

field. Regarding parenting projects, in contrast, the actual law in a respondent's country was fundamentally important in framing the validation of such projects.

It has been seen that societal transformations can be analysed as equivalent across European borders when comparable, internationalised and mobile environments are examined. In such a milieu, developments in neighbour countries have an important cross-national impact. The metropolitan lesbian and gay bar scene constituted a good example for such an understanding of cross-national milieu studies within European society.

4. Further research perspectives

The main theses, the narrative elements from the fieldwork, the argumentative logics and the discursive typologies that have been developed could form the basis of further research. Possible research projects that would have a different geographical or scope or of a different milieu within the same cities could draw concrete comparisons to the results from this milieu study. The typologies in chapters 3 to 5 as well as the findings formulated in chapters 6 and 7 could equally be used as a solid basis to inform quantitative research on the same questions.

Two examples for further qualitative studies can be mentioned here: the study of registered couples and the study of group discourses within generational focus groups.

The angle of studying partnership perspectives through the direct recruitment of gays and lesbians in bars has left aside another approach to the recognition of same-sex couples – one more focused on long-term partnerships. In such a perspective, the everyday life of lesbians and gays in partnerships and in their respective close social environments could have been analysed in more depth. While the focus of this study had clearly been on perspectives and projects that can be seen as relating to identity construction, the interplay between the two, and the relation between long-term partnerships and the milieu we have looked at could provide further insights into the interplay between milieu and identity construction in particular. In France, Germany and the UK, the study of partnerships that have signed a *Pacs*, *Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft* or Civil Partnership (and quantitative analyses on who these partners are) – as has now become a subject of research – could be included in the perspective of this thesis, as to how such legal recognition influences a symbolic positioning and validation of choices in the partners' everyday lives in their respective social environments. The findings

from this study could help to analyse partnership narratives in terms of the public and private positioning of sexual identity and how it is affected by the formalisation of the relationship. The analysis of the specific elements of the "couple discourse" can be sharpened through the findings from this project. Also, the question of reciprocity and equality could be taken up in analysing the partnership narrative as to what discourses have been established as legitimate and successful constructions of partnership and what normative frameworks are used within them.

The question of generational change has been addressed at several points within this study. Indeed, it has shown that the generational element constitutes a major factor in the construction of homosexual identity. A more systematized study of the generational question, e.g. through comparative focus groups in which generational norms would be best expressed, would allow for further insights into the question of recognition and transformation. For such a project, which would be less centred on individual typologies, the discursive constructions from the analysis in this thesis can provide a solid basis. Indeed, for focus groups, the work with a range of precise arguments that could be taken from this study would be essential in analysing the generational element in a group discourse on comparable sensitive topics. The norm of "openness" in particular provides an interesting example for a possible research design, where different "logics" may arise in the analysis of a group discourse as to what strategies of identity management are legitimate or not, such as on the basis of coherence, openness and reciprocity. The question of the extent to which stigma or the "insult" represents a core element of lesbian and gay identity construction, or the experience of norms within the lesbian and gay milieu itself, could equally constitute such topics to be addressed by drawing on the discourses within this study.

Appendix I:

Short abstracts of all respondents (pseudonyms)

1) Berlin:

Andreas (Berlin, 28)

Works in public administration/government, born in Magdeburg (East, now former-East-Germany), lived in Bonn for several years. Single, not necessarily aspiring to a relationship. Has lived in Berlin for 2 years. Lives on his own in central Berlin. Approached in "Stiller Don", Prenzlauer Berg, interview 2006.

Daniel (Berlin, 25)

Student in Physics. Born in Berlin (East), lives in Prenzlauer Berg. Single. Member of the German Green party. Lives on his own. Contacted in "Stiller Don" (Prenzlauer Berg), interview 2003.

Jenny (Berlin, 20)

Training as a nurse in a Catholic hospital. Born in a small town in Brandenburg (East, now former East Germany), and moved to Berlin (East) at the age of 4. She is single and lives on her own in Berlin Reinickendorf. Contacted in "Café Amsterdam" (Prenzlauer Berg) at the same time as her friend Jenny, interviewed jointly, 2003.

Hans (Berlin, 47)

Self-employed catering manager. Born in Berlin (West), lives in Berlin Wilmersdorf. Long-term ex-partner (40, also working in catering). Presently starting a new relationship with a younger man, but not sure about it. Lives on his own. Contacted in "Café Sundström" (Kreuzberg), interview 2003.

Heide (Berlin, 41)

Painter/Decorator. Born in South-West Germany, has moved to Berlin over 15 years ago, lives in Berlin Neukölln. She has a relationship of 7 years to a woman (39, therapist) who has been living in Hamburg for the past 5 years which proves difficult for the relationship. Lives on her own. Contacted at "Café Bierhimmel" (Kreuzberg) at the same time as her friend Simone, interviewed separately, 2003

Katharina (Berlin, 22)

Currently in an internship as a stage technician, planning to study Communications. Born in Poland, moved to Berlin (West) at the age of 8 just before the fall of the Wall. She lives in Berlin Charlottenburg, has both German and Polish citizenship and lives on her own. She identifies as bisexual. Contacted in "Café Amsterdam" (Prenzlauer Berg) at the same time as her friend Jenny, interviewed jointly, 2003.

Monika (Berlin, 38)

Hospital nurse, born in Strausberg (Brandenburg, East, now former East Germany). Lives in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg, where she has been living for over 10 years. Divorced from a heterosexual marriage, has a son aged 15 who lives with the father. Long-term girlfriend (25, works in education). Lives with the partner. Contacted in "Schall und Rauch" (Prenzlauer Berg) at the same time as her sister Petra. Interviewed jointly, 2003.

Petra (Berlin, 42)

Hospital nurse, born in Strausberg (Brandenburg, East, now former East Germany), still lives there and only occasionally comes to Berlin. Divorced from a heterosexual marriage, has a daughter aged 16 who lives with her. She is single but recently had a secret relationship with a girl (25, unemployed hairdresser) who simultaneously had a boyfriend. She defines herself as bisexual. Lives alone with her daughter. Contacted in "Schall und Rauch" (Prenzlauer Berg) at the same time as her sister Monika. Interviewed jointly, 2003.

Sven (Berlin, 39)

Freelance in communication, trainer and teacher after having been in long-term employment in advertising. Completed Management Studies. Lives in Berlin Wilmsdorf. Born in Münster, Westfalen. Lived in different places in Western Germany before moving to Berlin. In a relationship for 7 months. Lives on his own, but practically lives both in his flat and his partner's. He identifies as bisexual, however for the previous 5 years he has only had sexual relationships with men. Contacted in "Heile Welt" (Schöneberg), interview 2003.

Simone (Berlin, 43)

Self-employed photographer. Born in Berlin (West). Lives in Berlin Friedrichshagen. Girlfriend of nearly 4 years (Sociologist, 41). Lives on her own. Contacted at "Café Bierhimmel" (Kreuzberg) at the same time as her friend Nadine, interviewed separately, 2003.

Thorsten (Berlin, 71)

Priest (Lutheran), retired, born in Breslau (German at the time, Polish since 1945), lived in Sachsen-Anhalt for most of his life (East, now former-East-Germany), in Berlin since retiring (over 5 ago). Had several long relationships, of 14 and 10 years while living in a rural area. In a tentative relationship since 3 months with a much younger man (26, student, lives in Greifswald). Lives on his own in Berlin-Charlottenburg. Approached in "Stiller Don" (Prenzlauer Berg), interview 2006.

2) London:

Anne (London, 35)

Medicine student, previously management consultant. Degree in Politics. Born in Geneva, French citizen, grew up in a small town in France, close to the Swiss border. Lives in Clapham (South London) with her partner of 5 years (Scottish, works as a nurse, 29). Anne has been lesbian since the age of 28, previously in a long heterosexual relationship. Contacted at the same time as her girlfriend in "G-A-Y Bar" (Soho), the contact with her girlfriend remained inconclusive. Interview 2005.

Gareth (London, 45)

Employee in banking for 15 years. Born London, grew up Harlow, Essex. Grew up in child care. Lives in Central/North London, Camden. Fuck-buddy (40, working in media, advertising) for 3 years who himself has a partner. Had a relationship of 8 months several years ago. Lives on his own. Does not want to be in a couple. Experienced a terrible gay knifing attack in a cruising area in Walthamstow. Contacted in "Black Cap" (Camden), 2005.

Gemma (London, 39)

Works in Business Development. Studied law, biochemistry and management. Born in Greenock, Scotland. Studied in Aberdeen, has lived in London for 17 years. Present relationship of 5.5 years: Partner 45 years old, works in Communications for a charity. Lives with her partner in Camden (Central/North). Contacted in "First Out" (Tottenham Court Road/Covent Garden), 2005

Harriet (London, 35)

Works in IT, project support, Postgraduate studies in IT. Born in Norfolk, lives in South-East London (Peckham). Partner since 6 months: Julia. Lives with her ex-girlfriend. Contacted at the same time as Harriet in "First Out" (Tottenham Court Road/Covent Garden), 2004.

Jason (London, 47)

Management consultant. University, PhD level. Born in Devon. Lives on his own in the Eastend (Shoreditch). Boyfriend since four month (30, Iranian, catering, runs a pizza shop). Was married to a woman for 16 years. 3 step children, aged between 33 and 23, who momentarily interrupted contact to him after the divorce. Contacted in "Rupert Street" (Soho), interview 2005

Julia (London, 36)

Works in IT, BA degree. Born in a smaller town in Kent. Partner since 6 months: Harriet, 35. Lives alone in Brighton (80 km from London), from where she commutes to work. Contacted at the same time as Harriet in "First Out" (Tottenham Court Road/Covent Garden), 2004.

Kevin (London, 32)

Marketing for drama and dance school. Trained as performer and theatre producer. Born in Darlington. North England. Lives South East London, New Cross. Boyfriend since 2.5 years (28, catering manager, German). Lives with boyfriend and female flatmate in flatshare. Contacted at the same time as his friend Lasse in "G-A-Y bar" (Soho), interviewed separately, 2005.

Lasse (London, 37)

Florist, born in Odense, Denmark. In London for three years. Lives in Central London, Portobello. Had signed a Registered Partnership with his ex-boyfriend when he was 29, living in a small town, "divorced" at 33. Lives in a flatshare. Contacted at the same time as his friend Kevin in "G-A-Y Bar" (Soho), interviewed separately, 2005

Mark (London, 40)

Restaurant manager, lives in Enfield, single, born British South African, both citizenships, grew up in Yorkshire. Worked as a jockey in Germany and Spain from the age of 15, has lived in London for 15 years, first central, now Enfield (East London). Long relationship with ex-boyfriend (two years younger, Irish, banker) of 3.5 years, finished one year before the interview. Has had difficulties to overcome the relationship, which the partner terminated after testing HIV positive. Had also heterosexual relationships, last 5 years ago, defines himself as gay. Lives on his own. Approached in "Barcode" (Soho), interview 2005.

Matthew (London, 30)

Head of accounts, lives in East London (Stratford). Born London, grew up in the Caribbean, black Caribbean origins, British citizenship, in London again since 7 years. With his boyfriend (46, sales director) since 5 years, living with him for 3 years. His boyfriend was married to a woman before and has children, aged 17 and 19, living with her mother who are in regular contact with the couple. Matthew had very few casual sexual encounters, only with men, before meeting his boyfriend. Contacted at the same time as his friend Miguel in "Village Soho" (Soho), interviewed separately, 2004.

Miguel (London, 23)

Laboratory technician at university. Born Asturia, Spain, Spanish citizenship, in London since 1 year, previously Spain and Andorra. Had a two-year relationship before, now in a new relationship with a German man, 33, dental technician, who lives close to Berlin. Miguel plans to move there. Lives in a flatshare in central London, Victoria.. Approached in "Gay Village" (Soho) at the same time as his friend Matthew, interviewed separately, 2004.

Owen (London, 26)

Temporary administration work for a financial company. presently doing a part-time degree (BA). Born and grown up in a small town in Northern Ireland. In London since he was 18. Single. Lives in North East London (Dalston), in a flatshare with a girl. Contacted in "Compton's" (Soho), 2005

3) Paris:

Antoine (Paris, 50)

Stage actor. Born in Limoges (South-West), Paris since 1974. Single but has been seeing a man abroad regularly for several years. Previously had a long-term relationship of 12 years he does not want to talk about. He lives on his own in Central Paris. Contacted jointly with his friend Olivier at the "Duplex" (Marais/Beaubourg), interviewed separately, 2004.

Dominique (Paris, 53)

Graphic designer but currently freelance massage therapist. Born in Lausanne, Switzerland, lived in Switzerland until moving to Paris one year before the interview. She has Swiss citizenship. She lives on her own in Central Paris (13ème). Dominique envisages a committed partnership, but has been seeing her partner Fabienne on a regular albeit sometimes casual basis for the past 5 years. Both were contacted jointly at "Les Scandaleuses" (Marais), but interviewed separately. Interview 2004.

Dorothée (Paris, 26)

Animator for group travel organization. Studied foreign languages. Born in Clermont-Ferrand (Centre-South). Works mostly in Italy but spends half of her time in Paris since one year. She is at present seeing a girl (21, optician assistant) who herself has a long-term girlfriend. Dorothée has only just started frequenting lesbian and gay bars in Paris and feels very new to this environment. She has had a long relationship with a man but defines herself as exclusively lesbian. When she is in Paris, she stays at a hotel and otherwise stays in the Italian tourist villages where she works. Contacted at the "Bliss" (Marais, closed since), interview 2004.

Jacques (Paris, 55)

Worked as a school teacher, presently stopped working and took up university studies. Born in Bretagne. Grew up in children's care, in Paris and suburbs since. Single. Lives on his own in Western suburb Issy-Les Moulinaux. Contacted at the "Cox" (Marais), interview in 2003.

Jérémy (Paris, 30)

Student in literature at PhD level, part time private lessons (school support). Born in the suburbs North of Paris (93), where he also lives now. Single. He lives with his mother. Contacted at "La Petite Virtue" (Marais/Temple), interviewed 2004.

Julien (Paris, 29)

Technician in military electronics. Born in Normandy, then moved to the Northern suburbs of Paris (92), recently moved to Central Paris (17ème). Single, had a long-term relationship in the past with a man two years older. He lives on his own. Contacted at "Okawa" (Marais), interview 2004.

Léa (Paris, 30)

Police officer. She was born in a small town in the North of France, and has lived in Paris for 10 years. She is in a long-term relationship with a black French woman, who is 21 and is training as a chef. They live together in Central Paris. Contacted at the "Tropic" (Les Halles), interview 2003.

Nicole (Paris, 54)

Journalist. Studied philosophy and languages. Born in a smaller city in the North-West of France, moved to Paris in 1968 but has since spent many years working abroad, in Japan among other countries. She lives in Central Paris (Marais, 3ème) on her own with her adopted daughter aged 14. The daughter, born in Brasil, was adopted by her as a single parent and does not know about Nicole's homosexuality. Nicole does not conceive of relationships as central to her life but has been seeing her partner Fabienne on a regular albeit sometimes casual basis for the past 5 years. Both were contacted jointly at "Les Scandaleuses" (Marais), but interviewed separately. Interview 2004.

Olivier (Paris, 39)

Stage actor. Born close to Paris (Western suburbs), lives central and on his own. Now spends nearly half of his time working in London. Single. Contacted jointly with his friend Antoine at the "Duplex" (Marais/Beaubourg), interviewed separately, 2004.

Richard (Paris, 39)

State employed IT specialist. Born in Bordeaux, lived in Bordeaux and subsequently in Paris since 2000. French Afro-Caribbean origins (Antilles). In a long-term relationship with a man (28, student at the time). Lives on his own in Northern suburb (92). Contacted at "Open Café" (Marais), interview 2003.

4) Rome:

Angelo (Rome, 29)

Engineer. Born in Rome. Lives with his mother (Roma Alberone). Single. Contacted at the same time as his friend Carlo, at the "Gay Village" (Ostiense), interviewed jointly 2004.

Antonella (Rome, 24)

Student in medicine. Born in a small town in Calabria (Southern Italy), in Rome for four years. She lives in the South East of Rome, in a flatshare with another girl. Current girlfriend of four months (25, has just completed medical studies). Contacted at "Bocca di Bacco" (Trastevere, moved since), interviewed 2004.

Bianca (Rome, 43)

Employee in a shop (articles for pets). Born in Puglia (Southern Italy). Lived in Abruzzo with ex-girlfriend for several years before moving to Rome. Now seeing a woman on an casual basis (38, employee). Lives in a flatshare with two friends who are sisters. Contacted in "Circolo degli Artisti" (Porta Maggiore), interview 2004.

Carlo (Rome, 34)

Teacher at a school for children with disabilities. Born in Rome. Lives in the South East of Rome (Cinecittà) at his parents flat, who live there for half of the year. Single. Contacted at the same time as his friend Carlo, at the "Gay Village" (Ostiense), interviewed jointly 2004.

Claudia (Rome, 33)

Works as secretary for a medical practice, previously employed in a museum. Trained as an account. Born in Rome. She is single and lives with her parents. Contacted jointly with her friends Luisa and Marianna at the "Coming Out" (Collosseum), interviewed jointly in 2005.

Dario (Rome, 23)

Student in biology. Born in Rome, lives with his parents in the East of Rome. Recently started a relationship with Mario (two months). Both were contacted jointly at the "Coming Out" (Collosseum) but interviewed separately, 2004.

Elena (Rome, 31)

Works in education for children with special needs. Born in Rome. Lives in Central Rome (Colli Albani). She had a recently broken long-term relationship to a woman (30, biologist), but is now single. Lives in a flatshare with another lesbian friend. Contacted at the gay beach (Castel Fusano, "Settimo Cielo"), interview 2004.

Garbiella (Rome, 39)

Musician (Singer and violin teacher). Born in a small town close to Latina (Lazio). Lives on her own in the North of the city (Monte Mario). Has been with her current girlfriend for a year and a half (a 41 year-old journalist who is married to a man but about to get divorced) does not live in Rome, but they see each other on a regular basis. Contacted at the Coming Out (Collosseum) at the same time as Patti. Interviewed separately, 2004.

Luisa (Rome, 29)

Secretary for an insurance company. Born in Rome. Lives with her parents. Long-term relationship with Marianna. Lives with parents. Contacted jointly with her friends Marianna and Claudia at the "Coming Out" (Collosseum), interviewed jointly in 2005.

Marianna (Rome, 27)

Student in Political Science. Born in Rome. Lives with her mother. Long-term relationship with Luisa. Contacted jointly with her friends Luisa and Claudia at the "Coming Out" (Collosseum), interviewed jointly in 2005.

Mario (Rome, 25)

Student in communication sciences, part-time office job, free-lance writer. Born in Rome, South-East (Subaugusta). Lives with his parents after having left the house for half a year following a family crisis which was linked to his homosexuality. Contacted jointly with his boyfriend Dario at the "Coming Out" (Collosseum), interviewed separately, 2004.

Michele (Rome, 50)

Actor and TV presenter. Born in Northern Italy (Liguria), orphan at young age. Lives in Central Rome (Trastevere). Had a long-term relationship of 18 years to a man slightly younger who was also an actor. Now in a relationship with Raffaele. Contacted jointly at "Gay Village" (Ostiense), interviewed jointly in 2004.

Patti (Rome, 38)

Shop manager (clothing). Trained as accountant. Born in Messina (Sicily), where she lived until one year before the interview. She was married to a man and divorced. Lives in Central Rome (Re di Roma) in a flatshare with another woman. Recently started a relationship of two weeks with a younger woman. Contacted at the "Coming Out" (Collosseum) at the same time as Gabriella, interviewed separately, 2004.

Raffaele (Rome, 26)

Barman. Training for hotel and catering industry. Born in Puglia. He now lives with his partner Michele in Michele's flat in Trastevere (Central Rome). Contacted jointly at "Gay Village" (Ostiense), interviewed jointly in 2004.

5) Snowball interview

"Gloria" (Berlin, 37)

Self-employed drag queen. Born in a small town in the South-West of Germany (Mosel), but grew up in Berlin. Has signed a registered partnership with his boyfriend (26, Romanian citizenship, studied arts, works as a DJ). Lives on his in Berlin Schöneberg, where his partner was equally living. Interview 2003.

6) Focus group youth group MAG (Paris 2004)

Han:

26, boyfriend 34, works in advertising, completed studies at postgraduate level, born Paris, lives Paris, lives with boyfriend, South-East Asian background.

Cédric:

18, goes to school, born Portugal, in France since the age of 11, lives Versailles, lives alone.

Bastien:

20, student in biology, born Paris, lives Saint-Denis, lives with parents.

Jeanne:

20, student in biology, born Créteil, lives Créteil, lives with parents.

Tarek:

21, student in physics, born Lebanon, in Paris since 2 years, Lives in Vincennes, Lebanese and Swiss citizenship, strong believer, lives alone.

Appendix II : Questionnaire guide

1. Biographical account (5 min):

1. Could I ask you to tell me a little bit about yourself? Where you were born, where you live, may be since when you have been living in London, what you do?
2. What about relationships? Are you in a relationship, or single?

2. State recognition (15 min.):

1. RECOGNITION: OPEN QUESTION

We now have a legal recognition of same-sex partnerships in many European countries. In the UK we have the Registered Partnership now. In France for example the so-called *Pacs* since 1999, also in Germany there is contract for same-sex couples since 2000. In the Netherlands and Belgium lesbian and gay couples can now marry. In Spain, the government has equally opened marriage to gay and lesbian couples. Do you have an opinion about these developments?

2. SOCIAL CHANGE WITH RECOGNITION?

Are things different now as compared to before?

- What do you think has changed/ would change with a legal recognition of lesbian and gay couples?

3. SOCIAL CHANGE GENERALLY?

Do you think the last years have changed something about the view society has on homosexuality? Do you think it has been getting more or less accepted? Is it different to be lesbian or gay today? Or has it basically stayed the same?

- Have you talked with others about these questions? With whom? When you talk about it (homosexuality, the couple, the family), do you have the same opinions or do you sometimes disagree on things?

4. USE OPTION?

Do you think you will/would use a registered partnership yourself? Or marriage if you could? What advantages or problems do you see if you yourself register your partnership in this way?

5. KNOW SOMEONE REGISTERED?

Do you know (other) gay and lesbian couples who have registered their partnership?

- (What was your impression of what the registration of their partnership meant for them?)

6. (OPTIONAL: IDEAL PARTNERSHIP LEGISLATION?)

In political debates, different specific rights have been discussed that lesbian and gay couples could have. For example the right to citizenship or residence permit to foreign partners, to tax advantages, to inheritance, or to adopt children. What is your idea of what the recognition of the couple, and partnership laws in general, should be like?

II. Present (5-10 min):

7. RELATIONSHIP, DURATION

Are you in a relationship? / For how long have you been this relationship

8. HISTORY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Have you been in a relationship? / Is this your first longer relationship? / Have you had other relationships?

9. MOST IMPORTANT PERSON?

Would you say that your partner is the most important person for you, or would someone else be more important? / If you had a partner, do you see your partner as the most important in your life? Or would someone else be more important for you?

10. IF PARTNER: PRESENCE

How often do you see each other? / How often do you see her/him? / Is it the person you spend most time with?

11. IF PARTNER: TIME TOGETHER

When have you spent a day (or an afternoon) together for the last time? How did you spend your time together? Could you briefly describe your time together?

12. IF PARTNER: ROLE OF THIS PERSON

What is it about this person that makes her/him important in your life? (also in comparison to other persons you feel close to?)

III. Future (5 min.):

13. RELATIONSHIP IN FUTURE?

What about the future? Do you see a person as most important for you in the future? (Who do you think will be the most important persons in your life then?)

14. ACTUALIZATION

Imagine yourself together with this person in ten years time; you spend an afternoon, say a Sunday afternoon, together. How would that look like? / IF NOT PARTNER: Imagine yourself in ten years time; you have a free day, say a Sunday. Whom would you like to spend this day together with? How would that look like?

- **Does this idea of how you imagine please you? Is this how you want it to be like? Would there be alternatives to this situation in ten years time?**

IV. Society (15-20 min.):

15. EXPECTATIONS

Do you feel other people have strong opinions about how you should live your life?

- This could be parents, family, friends, colleagues? Do you think they have opinions of what kind of a partnership you are living?

16. FAMILY'S JUDGMENT (IF NOT PREVIOUSLY ANSWERED)

What about your family, your parents and grandparents for example? How do you think they see your personal and emotional life plans?

17. FRIENDS (IF NOT PREVIOUSLY ANSWERED)

And your friends? What do they think about it? What do they say about partnership and your love life?

18. GAY/LESBIAN EXPECTATIONS (IF NOT PREVIOUSLY ANSWERED)

What about gay and lesbian friends? Do you think they have opinions about how you should live your life? Do they have the same views as you on partnership ideals for example?

19. IF PRESSURE: CHANGE WITHOUT PRESSURES?

Do you think it would change something for you if you did not have these pressures? Say, others do not have opinions about what you do or would accept all your choices, would you do things differently? Would there be things you could decide more freely?

20. COLLEAGUES' JUDGMENT (IF NOT PREVIOUSLY ANSWERED)

What does your work/study environment think about your personal life? Would they know about a relationship you have? What would be the impact on your relations with your boss/teacher, your colleagues?

21. SOCIETY'S JUDGMENT / KISS IN PUBLIC?

Imagine yourself with your/a partner, you are in the street, and you show affection towards your partner, you kiss each other for example. How do people react? Or how do you think they would react?

22. CHANGE OF VIEWS IN DIRECT SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT?

Do you think the last years have changed something about the view your own family, your friends or colleagues have about homosexuality? The people you see every day, do they see the question of gay and lesbian life differently as compared to years ago?

23. (OPTIONAL, REPETITION: EASIER TODAY?)

Do you think, generally, it is easier or harder to be lesbian or gay today as compared to before?

- Do you think gay marriage or other forms of recognition of the couple change something / would change something?
- If changed: how do you think did this change come about? (Are there specific reasons why people change their opinions or their judgment on gay and lesbian couples?)

V. Traditional family plans (5+5 min):

(showing pictures of 'standard' families: large 1900 family with many children, traditional couple pictures, a picture of a traditional wedding today, a 'modern' core family with one or two children etc..)

24. REACTIONS TO TRADITIONAL FAMILY VIEWS

What do you think about these pictures, the people and families they show?

25. CHILDREN?(POINTING AT A PICTURE WITH A LARGE FAMILY)

What about children? Is the idea of having children something that matters to you?

26. OLD AGE PERSPECTIVE (POINTING AT A PICTURE WITH OLD PERSON)

How do you see your life when you are 60 years old? What will be important to you then you think? How would you see yourself in your social surrounding then?

(Showing pictures of same-sex couples and marriages, same-sex couples with children)

27. REACTIONS TO AFFIRMATIVE GAY FAMILY

What do you think about these pictures?

28. IMAGINED REACTIONS TO OWN WEDDING ETC

Imagine you are marrying your girlfriend/boyfriend and invite your parents, your friends and your colleagues to the wedding. How would they react? What would they think about the fact that you get married? (If married/registered/pacsed: Did you invite? How did they react? Would have reacted if invited?)

29. MARRIAGE FOR LIFE?

Do you think getting married is being together for life?

VI. Sexuality (5-10 min):

I would like to ask some questions about what you think about sexuality. If there is any question that you do not want to answer please interrupt me or just don't answer.

30. SEXUAL IDENTITY

Is sexual identity something important to you? Do you think it is something important for you that you are lesbian/gay or bisexual etc.?

31. IMPORTANCE OF SEX

How do you see the role of sex, I mean sexual activity in general, in your life, also in how you see your life in future? Do you think sex is something important for you? Do you see it as something central, or is it not important at all?

32. FIDELITY

Many people have occasional lovers next to their relationship; sometime couples talk openly about it. Others are faithful and feel their sexual desires are fulfilled in their relationship. What do you think about it? How is it in your relationship?/ How would it be for you if you had a relationship?

IF NOT ANSWERED: PARTNER'S BEHAVIOUR

In the long run, do you think your partner should always be faithful?

33. NUMBER OF PARTNERS

In the last two months, did you have zero, one, two, three or more sexual partners?

34. IMPACT OF COMMITMENT ON SEXUALITY

Do you think being married or having your partnership registered would change something about your sexuality? / (Did it change something?)

70 min

VII. Personal details

- 35. Age
- 36. Occupation
- 37. Education
- 38. Place of origin
- 39. City/area of residence (Borough, arrondissement, Bezirk etc.)
- 40. Nationality
- 41. Partnership situation: age and occupation of partner
- 42. Children
- 43. Parents marital situation
- 44. Relation to parents: a) Mother, b) Father
Very good, rather good, ok, rather bad, very bad
- 45. Are you religious, if yes: which religion?
Importance of religion:
Very important, rather important, somewhat important, not important at all
- 46. Political orientation: left, centre, right
- 47. Activism, militantism: Are you member or do you feel close to a lesbian/gay association or group or in general to a political association or party?
- 48. Living situation: alone, with partner, flat share, parents etc.

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